

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME ONE

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING



A LUCKY ACCIDENT

By WARWICK DEEPING



I KNEW that I was in for a smash when I came round that corner at thirty miles an hour and saw that a fool of a carter had pulled his wagon and its team right across the road and left them there while he went to shut the field gate. There were no grass verges; steep banks went right up from the water channels on either side, and the leading horse had his nose nearly into the hedge.

It was horse, wagon, or bank, and I chose the bank. I remember seeing the leading horse rear as though a shell had exploded under his nose. Then my machine and I went somewhere into space, and I had no more conscious interest in life and in the ways of country carters.

They told me afterwards that I owed my life to the fact that I had been pitched clear of my machine into a field of flowering beans. The stiff stems matted themselves under me and saved me a broken neck.

It appeared to be dusk when I came to myself, but it was by no means a pleasant self that was in possession. I was in vile pain, for my right leg ached as though someone had been hammering it for half an hour, and I was in the most execrable of tempers. My eyes were half covered by a bandage, and I felt hot and stifled.

"Confound it!"

I raised a hand to hitch up the bandage, but someone moved beside the bed, and slid that bandage down further over my eyes.

"Hang it all!" I said.

A woman's voice answered me. I suppose that they had provided me with a nurse, and this irritated me as much as anything. I suppose I had had such a jolting up that the whole soul of me was sore and savage.

"Please keep still. And that bandage ought to be over your eyes."

"Where am I?" I asked.

"At Yew Tree Farm. You have been unconscious for two days."

The whole adventure came back to me,

and all my irritability vented itself suddenly upon that fool of a carter who had caused the smash.

"I remember now," I said, "an idiot of a fellow with a wagon and horses —"

I felt a hand on my forehead.

"Please—you are not to talk."

"I simply must talk; it's like letting off steam. An idiot of a fellow with a wagon and two horses ran them right across the road and left them there—just round a nasty corner. I had to go up the bank. I suppose my motor-bike is a wreck?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Someone will have to pay damages. I shall sue that idiot's employer. There will be a nice bill."

I thought I heard her sigh. She rose, crossed the room, and I heard the clinking of a glass. Then she came back, and put a hand under my head.

"Drink this. It will make you feel less restless."

"I don't want to——"

"You must."

She had her way, and in a little while all the soreness went out of my soul, and I fell asleep.

That sleep must have done me good, for when I woke, I felt at peace with the world, and that right leg of mine no longer hurt me. I was lying in a solid mahogany bed in a good-sized room that looked as though it belonged to a very old house. The casement windows were hung with white muslin curtains; a big beam crossed the ceiling just over my head; the floor went up and down, and the fire-place was an ancient thing that might have been placed there in the reign of Queen Anne. It was a pleasant room, not too bright, and not too dark. Moreover, someone had taken that confounded bandage away, and my head felt cool and sane.

I was wondering what had become of my nurse when the door opened, and a girl in a white linen dress came in. She was carrying a bowl of roses, and I

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noticed how black her hair looked in contrast to the white of her dress and the red of the flowers.

Her eyes smiled at me directly she saw that I was awake, but, caught in the moment of repose, her face had looked troubled and sad.

"How are you feeling?"

She came and set the roses on the table beside my bed.

"Much better tempered. The nurse told me, yesterday, that I was not to talk."

"Did she!"

"I came to in a rage against the idiot who caused the accident. It was quite absurd, the fury I was in. Of course, I shall sue his employer, and there's an end of it."

She stood at the end of the bed, looking at me with those sad eyes of hers.

"I am sorry. It was our carter; he's deaf. So you will have to sue us—if we don't pay."

She spoke in a tired way, as though life was not running easily and one more worry did not make much difference. But the way she looked and the weariness of her voice made me feel a beast, though I had spoken in ignorance.

"I did not mean that, you know. You see, I'm quite in the dark. It is very good of you to have me here, and, of course——"

I think she thought that I was going to offer to pay for my board and lodging, for she broke in rather abruptly as it seemed to me:

"They brought you here; it was the nearest house. It was our man's fault, and the least we could do was to look after you. Besides, I have had some training as a nurse——"

"Then it was you I grumbled at yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry," I said. "You must have thought me a sort of savage."

"Oh, no; you were in pain."

I heard voices on the stairs; footsteps came along the passage, the door opened, and a very brisk and cheerful gentleman appeared. He had doctor written all over him—that blithe, sporting type of medico that is to be found in a hunting country.

"Hallo! You look more human this morning."

The girl slipped out of the room, and left me alone with the doctor.

He examined me, chatting all the time, but I had a feeling that I was in capable and sporting hands.

"You got pretty bad concussion, you know, and your right leg was smashed. That same fool of a carter nearly broke me up about a month ago. I have advised the Furnivals to get rid of him."

This led up to what I wanted to ask him.

"I say, I'm like a babe unborn. I don't know where I am or who these people are."

"We are pretty much in the same case. Of course, we had your number——"

"I'm an orphan," I said; "a couple of ancient aunts, that's all. My name's Richardson. I'm an 'art expert,' and doing pretty well. But these people?"

"The Furnivals. Good old country stock. This is Yew Tree Farm. It belongs to them—or did."

"Was that the daughter?"

"Yes; Miss Rose Furnival. There are only the father and daughter."

I lay staring at the window.

"Look here, Dr.——"

"Graham."

"Dr. Graham. Can they afford to have me here? One can't——"

He answered me squarely, like the sportsman he was.

"No, they can't afford it; but here you are. Old Furnival has been in trouble for some time; not a finer sporting farmer in the country. I'm afraid there will be a smash before long. Everything points that way."

"Of course, I shan't cause them any trouble—about this affair. I mean, I shan't expect them to pay."

"Well, you are taking it out in board and lodging and nursing."

I laughed.

"I like a man to be frank. I thought that girl looked worried. I suppose I couldn't offer to pay?"

"Do you think you could suggest it to Miss Furnival?"

"No."

"Just so. And the old man is of the same build."

"How long shall I be here?"

"Five or six weeks, at least."

"Good heavens! They'll bless me!"

"Even if they don't like it, they won't"

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show it. The Furnivals know how to behave."

When he left me I told him to ask old Furnival to come and see me. He came—a big, fresh-coloured old man, with very dark eyes and a very white head of close-cropped hair. I had learnt in my time to know when a man is worried, and I saw that old Furnival had been down in the deeps. But he had pluck and breeding, and he talked to me with a kind of jovial fatherliness that made my heart feel warm.

"I'm giving you a confounded lot of trouble."

"Don't you worry about that. It was my man's fault. I saw the thing happen."

"You?"

"Yes. I don't often use language to my men, but—Then there's your machine—so much scrap-iron."

I broke in on him hurriedly.

"Oh, we'll cry quits over all that, Mr. Furnival. It doesn't worry me; and I am grateful to you for taking me in."

His eyes brightened to mine.

"We'll see about that," he said.

"Please try to forget all about it," I answered.

So the days began to go by. I had nothing to worry me, for Simpson, my partner, came down to see me. The business was going on all right; there was nothing for me to do but to lie still and grow fat while my leg mended.

But some men have a knack of creating worries, and in my case I adopted somebody else's. Rose Furnival and the little maid looked after me, and each evening the old man would come up and smoke his pipe and talk. He never talked about himself and his affairs, but there was a restlessness about his eyes that made me realise that there were disturbing thoughts behind that genial, fresh-coloured face.

As for Rose, she brought me flowers and read to me, and I began to look for her coming, and to grow inarticulate in her presence. I liked to see her sitting there in the basket-chair by the window, a red rose tucked into her white blouse, the sunlight shining on her hair.

She, too, had the same sadness in her eyes. There was a kind of tragic suspense choking that old house. I could feel it, and it began to worry me the more I thought of Rose.

I tried to trick her into talking of the farm and of her father, but she would not be lured in the direction that I desired. I questioned Graham; but Graham did not know very much more than I did.

"I expect it's old Bawtreys," he said.

"Who is Bawtreys?"

"A man of substance, sir; a gentleman who farms mortgages, and has grown fat on it. I half suspect Silas Bawtreys has his grip on Yew Tree Farm."

I was fated to see this gentleman for myself. They had moved my bed to the window, so that I could lie there and look out over the home paddock and the garden that stretched in front of the house.

I was lying there reading one afternoon when I heard the click of the white gate that led from the garden into the paddock, and, glancing up, I saw a man walking up the brick-paved path. He was one of the bulkiest men I have ever seen; his white waistcoat was like a ship's sail, and his feet looked as though they would crush the bricks. He had a big, round, bumpy face, with staring blue eyes, and a heavy double chin. But it was the arrogance of the man that struck me. It oozed out of him. He was as big with it as a brewer's drayman is big with beer.

He disappeared from my view, and I heard the bell rung so that it went on jangling for several seconds. Old Furnival was in. I had seen him cross the garden five minutes before the fat man appeared.

Now, my bedroom was immediately above the room that served Roger Furnival as a combination of office and library, and, since the windows were open, I could hear a good deal of all that passed. The fat man had been shown into the farmers' study.

Directly I heard his voice I knew he was a bully.

It was a throaty, blaring, insolent voice, the voice of a successful beast who was ready to trample on anyone who got in his way.

"Well, Furnival, I thought I should have heard from you before this."

I could not hear what Furnival said. His voice was quiet, grimly and bitterly restrained.

"The time's getting rather short, isn't

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it? You've had my notice, you know. Are you going to find the money?"

I thought of throwing the book on the floor to remind them that there was someone up above, but some shrewder, and perhaps more generous, idea restrained me.

I lay and listened to that blatant voice, and to old Furnival trying to plead with the man and at the same time to keep his pride.

It made me savage. I came by a pretty clear notion of what this big man's business was, and when he departed I watched his broad back and the wrinkles of fat above his collar, and felt somehow that I, too, had been insulted by his arrogance because of Rose and her father.

Then Rose came in with my tea, and I saw that she had been crying, nor was she the kind of soft fool who cries upon any provocation.

It made me feel desperate and gave me the courage to be officious.

"Who was that fat beast who has just gone out of the gate?"

She handed me the tray, and I saw her lower lip quivering.

"Do you mean Mr. Bawtreys?"

"Oh, is that his name? Rose, the beast has such a voice that I couldn't help hearing."

She gave me a kind of helpless look, and sat down suddenly in a chair that stood near the bed.

"Oh!"

She covered her face with her hands as though ashamed that I should know. As for me, I was so blind to the immediate details of life that I upset the cup of tea on the tray.

"Rose, I couldn't help it; and, somehow, I'm glad."

Her hands dropped and she gave a little tragic exclamation.

"Oh, you have upset your tea!"

"Confound the tea," I said. "I'll give you a new cloth. But about that fat beast—well, he made me feel savage. Look here, Rose, don't you think I have turned into a friend? I don't want to thrust myself forward, but you've made me want to be more than an idle lump lying in a bed."

I put things pretty clumsily—I imagine that most men say things clumsily on such occasions—but she looked straight

at me, and her dark eyes were not afraid of mine.

"We are going to lose the farm," she said, "and it has belonged to the Furnivals for nearly two hundred years. That is what is breaking father's heart."

"And that fellow in the white waistcoat?"

"Father had to mortgage the farm, and Silas Bawtreys bought up the mortgage from the other man. But that's not all. Father has bills against him, and Bawtreys has got these into his hands. He wants the place. He offered to buy father out three years ago."

"How much is the mortgage?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds. And we owe another three hundred."

"Can't you raise the money somewhere?"

She looked at him hopelessly.

"As if we hadn't tried."

I had some money of my own, but pretty well every penny was tied up in the business and in such investments as old silver, china, Sheffield plate, furniture, and the thousand odd antiques that the collecting public loves. I might have laid my hand on five hundred pounds, but that would not have filled Silas Bawtreys's mouth. Moreover, it was not the money he wanted, but the farm.

"How long has your father got?"

"Another month."

"We must do something," I said decisively, but without the vaguest notion of what was to be done.

Her eyes were looking at me as though she had a belief in my power to help them.

"Rose," I said, "I would advance the money myself, but the bother is—I haven't got it."

She flushed up.

"Oh, Mr. Richardson, we couldn't —"

"I'm not Mr. Richardson," I said. "I'm Jim—or James, if you want to be formal. You know I'm going to get up to-morrow, Rose. Graham says I can—now that my leg is in plaster. We must do something."

She looked at me appealingly.

"Father must not know that you know. The Furnivals are queer people when their pride is hurt. Do you know what I am afraid of, Jim?"

"What?"

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"That he will—kill—that man."

"Good God! But I can understand him doing it, Rose. That beast rouses all the primitive feelings in one."

I think she was happier when she left me, for she had eased her heart of some of its silent dread, and I had talked more cheerfully than I had any right to do.

I got up next day after breakfast, and a pretty poor sort of creature I felt for the first ten minutes. My right leg was as stiff and rigid as an oak post, and I found dressing myself a curiously exhausting business. But I knew that I could not lie in that bed any longer while Rose and her father were worried and at their wits' end to know what to do.

Old Furnival had gone out to walk over the farm, and Rose, hearing me stumping downstairs with my improvised crutch, came out to show me the way. The stairs were of solid oak, and they led down into a stone-paved hall, very bare and simple, with a gate-legged table in the centre, and half a dozen Sheraton chairs ranged round the walls.

"This way—Jim."

It was a rather dark room was the dining-room, long and low-ceilinged, and full of beams. An old Turkey carpet covered the floor; the table looked like an old church table, and there were several fine Jacobean chairs. The mantelpiece carried a weight of pewter, and there were a few dusky old pictures in gold frames on the walls.

Rose had drawn a chintz-covered couch to the window.

"I thought you would like to lie here. Here's to-day's paper. I have some cooking to do."

She left me alone there, but I was not interested in the day's news. I lit a pipe and sat on the edge of the couch, thinking, looking at nothing in particular, but conscious of the brown and reposeful charm of the old room. Habit made me glance at the furniture and the pewter with a professional eye.

It was a room of queer lights. Some of the pictures were in deep shadow, and looked absolutely black. I got up and examined the pewter; it was genuine old stuff with the mark of an early eighteenth century London maker. The Jacobean



"Why, you are interested in the Sad Lady"

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chairs, too, were splendid. They were set back against the walls; two rush-bottoms did everyday duty.

I strolled round looking at the pictures. They needed cleaning, and most of them were those extraordinary landscapes that originated heaven knows where. The picture in the dimmest corner seemed to be a portrait. I glanced at it rather perfunctorily, and then looked again.

Under all its dirt and duskiness something familiar struck my eye. Perhaps it was the thing's "manner," the particular atmosphere that a lover of pictures learns to associate instinctively with a certain name.

I lifted it down, took it nearer the window, and set it on one of the Jacobean chairs. Dim as it was, I saw that it was the portrait of an eighteenth century lady—a woman with a sensitive and alluring face, her hazel eyes looking at me sadly as though I could understand nothing of her trouble. A queer thrill went through me. Surely I knew whose hand had painted that!

I looked for a signature or initials, but could find nothing. And yet the longer I stared at that picture the more the excitement of the expert grew in me.

I was still examining it when Rose returned.

"Why, you are interested in the Sad Lady!"

"Is that what it is called?"

"That's what I christened it when I was a child."

I tried not to betray my excitement.

"Have you always had this picture?"

"I know it belonged to some great-grandmother."

"And she brought it into the Furnival family?"

"I believe so. It has always hung there in the dark corner ever since I can remember."

She was watching my face.

"You are excited about this picture, Jim?"

I had to tell her.

"My dear, it is a Romney, or I know nothing of art."

She coloured up, perhaps because I had betrayed more things than one.

"What—Romney, the great painter?"

I fell into a sudden panic lest I should be rousing false hopes.

"It looks like one of his, Rose. But,

you see, it wants cleaning; and then experts will have to see it."

"Jim, would it be worth much?"

"Oh—something," I said guardedly.

I felt a sudden feverish desire to rush up to town with the picture, to show it to Simpson, and to have it cleaned. Supposing it were a Romney! Why, there would be half a dozen rich virtuosos ready to bid for it.

"Rose," I said, "is there such a thing as a motor to be hired in these parts?"

"There is one at Hargrave."

"Well, I am going up to town tomorrow."

"To London?"

"I want you to let me take this picture with me. I want some experts to see it. Your father mustn't know."

"Then you think, Jim, it may be worth something—might help us?"

"Yes."

She came a little nearer to me, looking in my eyes.

"It's good of you, Jim."

"It's sheer selfishness," I said. "You have turned me into a mass of prejudices, Rose."

"Have I!"

"Well, will you trust me with the picture?"

"Of course. I have got one in my bedroom I can hang in its place. Father will never notice."

"Excellent! And I can send a note to the motor man at Hargrave? I suppose the car isn't a mere relic?"

"It's new. Bob could ride over on his bicycle."

"I'll write that letter now. And we must pack up the picture; you and I can nail it up in some sort of case."

"We could do it in the lumber-room. There are a lot of old cases there. Shall I get you some notepaper?"

I glanced again at the picture.

"Rose, dear," I said, "don't get excited over this. I may be all wrong. But I'm in your debt, and——"

"Oh, no, Jim."

"Yes, I am," I said, almost sharply; "and I don't know that I regret it, that's all."

We packed up the picture, and I am sure that Rose did not realise the bigness of the adventure. She was excited, but not to the level of a possible Romney. As for me, I tried not to be too sanguine.

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The Hargrave motor-car proved to be quite a respectable machine; moreover, its driver turned out to be a Londoner, who had no objection to metropolitan traffic, and in three hours I was in Bond Street.

Partner Simpson was astonishingly glad to see me.

"I've been worked to death, old man. What have you got there? Plunder? Chickens, and butter, and eggs?"

Two of our men had carried the packing case into our private room.

"Something I want you to look at, Simpson. Just fetch a case opener, will you, Thomas."

I gave Simpson no hint as to what was inside, but when the men had opened the case I lifted the picture out, unwrapped the old sheet we had swathed it in, and stood it on a chair in the best light I could find.

Simpson was more an expert at pictures than I was; he had an absolutely uncanny knowledge of them, and I watched his face as he looked at the "Sad Lady." He stood back, went near, knelt down, moving his head from side to side, jumped up, and stood off again with an air of concentrated earnestness.

"Good God, man, it's a Romney, or I'm no judge at all."

"That's what I thought."

"Where on earth did you get it?"

I told him the whole tale.

After that we had an exultantly busy day. We hired a taxi, and looked up about half a dozen experts, including a well-known R.A., and their verdict was unanimously with us. The picture was a Romney, or they knew nothing about pictures.

I took care that the newspaper men should get hold of this "art sensation," and I stayed that night in town because of possible developments on the morrow.

Several papers next morning had paragraphs upon the discovery.

"An undoubted Romney has just come to light. It is the portrait of an unknown lady in late eighteenth century costume. Quite a number of connoisseurs have seen it, and believe it to be a genuine Romney. The picture may be seen in the show-room of Messrs. Richardson and Simpson, the well-known dealers in old pictures and antiques."

I sent a note to Rose:

"Matters are going very well. I am staying in London for a day or two. I hope to bring you news before long."

There was more of a personal nature, but it need not be recorded.

Quite a crowd of experts came to see the "Sad Lady," and some rich amateurs among them. Practically all of them agreed that the picture was genuine; moreover, the matter was settled by something we found on the back of the canvas when we took away the backing. A piece of paper had been pasted on to the canvas, and on the paper, in faded ink, were written four lines of a poem, with the painter's initials beneath it.

Simpson and I knew what we were doing.

"There are Rosenheim and Steggall," he said, "both mad on Romneys. They hate each other. We should get a good price."

Messrs. Rosenheim and Steggall were millionaire virtuosos. We approached both of them, though I left the matter to Simpson. He had a deft touch in handling such transactions.

Rosenheim made an offer; Steggall countered it. The game went on for three days.

Then Simpson rushed in on me one morning as excited as a boy.

"Steggall's swallowed it."

"How much?" was all I asked.

"Two thousand, five hundred. I've got the cheque here."

I thought of Rose, and old Furnival, and that fat beast in the white waist-coat.

Within the hour I had cashed Steggall's cheque, drawing the money in notes, and was away in a fast car, doing forty miles an hour on the open stretches. The driver and I lunched on the way, and I reckoned that I should be at Yew Tree Farm about three.

It was ten past three when the chauffeur turned into the farm road. I told him he could go straight round to the stables, for I had seen Rose sitting in the garden under the shade of a lime, and the chauffeur would have been superfluous.

I hobbled towards the white gate, and I saw her rise and come to meet me.

"Here we are!"

She was more than glad to see me, but her eyes were sad.

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"I didn't know you were coming, Jim."

"I have made a surprise of it. We have sold the picture."

"Oh! And did it fetch much?"

"Guess."

"Fifty pounds?"

"You dear innocent," I said. "Come into the house; I have something to show you."

We went into the dining-room, and I pulled out my pocket-book.

"Silas Bawtreys is coming this afternoon," she said.

"Oh—is he? I'm rather glad of that."

I handed her the notes in a banker's envelope.

"Just count those, Rose, will you? There ought to be two thousand, five hundred pounds."

She didn't attempt to count them; she just stood staring at me and holding the envelope.

"Jim, I don't believe it. The picture didn't sell for so much as that."

"But it did. A millionaire has bought it."

"I believe this is your money."

"Rose, I'm telling you the simple truth, dear. I can show you all the papers."

She burst into tears, and somehow I found my arms round her.

Presently we heard old Furnival's voice in the garden; he was speaking to one of his men.

Rose gave me a dear look and ran out to meet him.

"Let me tell him, Jim."

Old Furnival walked into that room looking younger by ten years. He was holding Rose's hand, and there was a queer light in his eyes.

"I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Richardson."

"There's nothing to say, sir," I said; "it was just luck, in a way."

"It's God," said he.

Well, old Bawtreys came; we heard him ring the bell like thunder. Roger Furnival insisted on having us with him, and I know that I, for one, wanted to see Silas Bawtreys's face.

The little maid showed him in, and he came in with his hat on, but he took it off when he saw Rose.

"Little family party, is it, Furnival?"

He looked hard at me.

"Your lawyer, I suppose? I'm my own lawyer. I think the girl might go, Furnival. I don't like talking before women."

Roger Furnival stood up.

"I've got the money, Bawtreys," he said, "and I'll do the business through my lawyers."

The fat man's white waistcoat seemed to swell.

"You've got the money?"

"I have."

"I don't believe it."

"You will, when you find that my cheque is all right. And now, look here, sir, I think you had better get out of this house."

I think he realised of a sudden that we were enjoying him and his disgust, for his face went brick-red and the veins swelled on his forehead.

"Well, I'm——! And who is the fool who has lent you the money?"

Furnival pointed to the door.

"I give you three minutes to get outside my gate. I'm a strong man, Bawtreys, though I'm sixty-five. March!"

He went.



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Illustrated by **STANLEY LLOYD**

FAILURE

by
C. WARWICK DEEPING

THE old pear tree behind the thorn hedge was dropping its crimson leaves in the frosty November sunlight. It looked like a burning torch or a gorgeous fountain of colour, and the girl in the lane stopped to gaze at it.

"Just the colour of my new dress."

A puff of wind brought down a scattering of the crimson leaves, and as they fell the girl's eyes watched them. Some came to rest among the yellow leaves of the thorn hedge; others reached the grass and lay brilliantly upon its greenness. A moment ago the girl's face had been bored and listless, but the flaming tree, like some thing of enchantment, scattered the light from its leaves upon her face.

"Heavens," she thought, "isn't that like us! I could think of nothing but a new frock. We are most horribly crude."

Her glance left the tree and wandered rather vaguely towards the cottage to which the tree belonged. She saw it as a queer, white oblong, with its thatched roof slipping down over its sleepy eyes, and the whiteness of it laced and criss-crossed with creepers. A brick path with box edging led up to a faded blue door under a faded blue trellis porch. Several big yew trees made a dark smother about the place, and behind it an orchard and a paddock sloped upwards

towards the pine-woods. On the right a knot of old outhouses, decrepit and mellow, seemed to stand together in intimate and comfortable confabulation. The thatch of one of them looked like ragged brown fur. The red-tiled roof of another showed curves that were beautiful in their waywardness.

From one of these buildings came the sound of the sawing of wood. The sawing ceased for a moment, and a man's voice could be heard calling a dog.

"Jack, Jack—here, boy, here."

It was a pleasant voice, a voice in which laughter seemed very near.

"Hallo—you scoundrel!"

It merged into the ecstatic and affectionate sneezings and yelpings of a dog, a dog that was being fondled and was using its tongue.

The girl walked on.

"How comfortable! Human!"

That was the impression left with her, though she could hardly translate it into words. Also, it left her with a look of discontent, a discontent that was not bitter, but an instructive questing after some elemental self-realization that was deep and true.

Sanchia was unhappy. It is probable that she was the only member of the Bawtrey family who was so fortunate as to be unhappy. The Bawtreys were successful people, fatally

successful. They were new folk—yet even Sigurd the father had had such faith in the ascent of the family that he had given his children spacious-sounding names—Sanchia, Isabelle, Marmaduke, Lionel, Clarence. His wife had protested and died. Sanchia! She had wished to be the mother of a Tom and a Mary, but Sigurd, that big-nosed and rampant stockbroker's clerk, had seen himself wearing a sword.

Sanchia turned in at the park gates, and her feet brushed the fallen yellow leaves. The darkness seemed to grow more intense under the autumnal branches of the oaks. Wilford Hall had become the family seat of the Bawtreys. There had been a Marquis of Wilford in Jacobean days—but the title was dead—and Sigurd intended to resuscitate it. Lord Wilford. He looked it, and he knew that he looked it. Sigurd collected Vandykes.

SANCHIA went straight to her room. The Bawtreys had a house-party, and the house-party had decided for a *thé dansant* in the ballroom, but Sanchia was bored with house-parties and club dancing. She rang for her maid.

"Bring me some tea here, Sandys."

Her latest dress, a Paris frock of crimson, had been laid out on the bed. She glanced at it casually, and picking up a copy of a popular illustrated weekly she sat down in the arm-chair in front of the fire and began to turn over the pages. It was a gay paper—feverishly and forcefully gay—full of women with ivory smiles and an air of "See me—and die." In it you met the fashionable world, the theatrical world, the music-hall world, riding to hounds, blowing trumpets, showing legs. Everyone seemed to have the same smile. The pictures shouted at you: "See—here are all the successful people. Come out into the limelight."

Sanchia threw the paper on the floor.

"Yes, that's just it," she thought; "all the successful people trying to pretend they are riotously joyous and happy. Aren't there any unsuccessful people in the world? Why not make a cult of the failures just for a change? It might be more interesting."

Sandys brought in Sanchia's tea—and a moment before the girl's arrival Sanchia had noticed a white card propped against the Sèvres candlestick on her mantelpiece. Someone had sent the Hall folk tickets for the Wilford village dance. They were not expected to come, but they were expected

to send a cheque. Sanchia had taken a ticket and forgotten all about it.

WILFORD VILLAGE CLUB.

DANCE.

8-30 P.M. IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

ADMIT ONE.

Price 2s.

Morning Dress.

Sanchia had reached for the card.

"Sandys."

"Yes, miss?"

"Have you ever been to one of these dances?"

Sandys had become infected with the disastrous spirit of success that permeated Wilford Hall.

"No, miss. Stuffy things. No class at all."

Sanchia replaced the card on the mantelpiece.

"I see it is to-night," she said.

A sudden whim—some wayward impulse had persuaded her to go.

Sanchia dined in her room. She gave it out that she had a headache, and no one bothered her by coming to sympathize. At eight-fifteen she put on her furs, went down the servants' staircase and escaped by one of the garden doors. She walked down to Wilford under the full moon, past the old pear tree and the funny old white cottage with its eyebrows slipping over its eyes. The schoolroom was by the church. She heard music, the movement of many feet.

An old gentleman in a suit of snuff-coloured tweeds met her at the door.

"Ladies' cloak-room on right, miss."

Then he stared at her through his glasses. He knew all Wilford and everyone within three miles of Wilford.

"Miss Bawtreys!"

She smiled at him.

"I hope they won't mind."

"Bless me, it's an event!"

Sanchia went into the cloak-room, and the old gentleman—he was the village postmaster—hustled off to warn the master of the ceremonies.

"Mr. Sellwood, Miss Bawtreys's here!"

John Sellwood was standing near the piano, talking to the rector. He was fairish, in age about three and thirty, with the head of a mild and contemplative lion. Leisurely and quiet, he had a way of looking at strangers with a pair of unhurried blue eyes before beginning to speak.

"Miss Bawtrêy! Good Lord!"

He smiled half-apologetically at the rector.

“Rather a shock, sir! I suppose I had better—”

The rector nodded.

Sanchia found this quiet man waiting at the door for her when she entered the schoolroom. She was just a little shy. She felt a stranger.

“It is very good of you to come, Miss Bawtrey.”

They looked at each other. She recognized his voice, the pleasant voice of the man who lived in the white cottage behind the crimson pear tree.

“I wanted to. I’m afraid I am rather a stranger.”

He realized her shyness, her sense of isolation, and he asked her to dance. The room had loudly encored a fox-trot. There were many eyes that were none too friendly to Sanchia. Had she come to swank?

“My name’s Sellwood,” he explained. “I’m sort of responsible for this show.”

“Oh yes, you live at Fir Croft don’t you?”

“And I sell you eggs!”

She laughed.

“Do you? They are very good eggs.”

She drifted off with him among the village couples, over a floor that would have filled

the Wilford house-party with scorn. The orchestra consisted of a piano and violin, and the music was three seasons old. Her partner had none of the new steps, but he danced with a suggestion of courtesy that was new to her. She enjoyed it, and she was surprised.

He asked her if he might find her other partners.

“Why—of course,” she said. “I have come to dance.”

The rector was her second



He realized her shyness, her sense of isolation, and he asked her to dance.

partner. He waltzed in the old-fashioned way, and with an air of being greatly amused at himself doing it. He was a little ecstatic and jerky.

"Very good of you to turn up like this, Miss Bawtrey."

"I ought to have come before."

"Well, perhaps you'll come again. It was Sellwood's idea. Great man—Sellwood."

"He farms?" she asked.

"Health, you know. A man who makes the best of things. Does a little with chickens and fruit and a cow. But he's an asset."

Her eyes encouraged the rector to go on.

"Sellwood believes in the old village life, you know. May Day—and music and games, and all that sort of thing. He's hundreds of years old."

She laughed.

"He doesn't look it!" she said.

Sanchia danced again with Sellwood. She spoke to him about the pear tree, and his eyes lit up.

"Yes, isn't it gorgeous? It starts maroon, turns crimson, and then changes to a kind of rosy gold. I call it the Tree of Heaven."

"It's such a pretty old place—your cottage."

"Straight out of Hardy," he said; but she did not know who Hardy was.

Later she danced with a speechless young farmer, somebody's gardener, and the Wilford insurance agent. She was sitting out with the latter gentleman, near the door, when a woman in an ulster bundled in.

"I want Mr. Sellwood."

Mr. Sellwood came.

"Oh, Mr. Sellwood, we're in such a way. It's a bad case, and Dr. Smiles—he wants help—someone to go to Guildford and fetch another doctor. And we thought of you—and your little car—"

Sellwood said, "Of course. I can get going in a quarter-of-an-hour."

He went, and with such quiet, instant cheerfulness that his going seemed the most natural thing in the world. And Sanchia suddenly remembered him and his car, a little old ancient thing which he used for carting about eggs and fruit. She could remember her brother Marmaduke sweeping past it in his big car, and laughing at "the blighter in his pump-machine." But Marmaduke was treading in the footsteps of his father.

Sanchia was home at the Hall before eleven; she had paused on the way to say

good night to Sellwood's Tree of Heaven. The house-party were still dancing, and she blundered upon her second brother, Lionel, and a girl, sitting out upon the stairs.

"Good Lord, Sankey, thought you were in bed! Where—the——"

She hated the nickname Sankey, and she retaliated.

"Don't be inquisitive, Moody. A bet—that's all. Keep quiet."

She went to her room laughing. She looked at herself in her glass and saw another Sanchia, a Sanchia with colour in her cheeks, and eyes that were alive. Extraordinary! She had enjoyed herself at that potty little village dance, and enjoyed herself with a mysterious simplicity. She fell asleep thinking of John Sellwood's Tree of Heaven.

NEXT week snow fell, and Sanchia was all alone at Wilford. Sigurd was at his club, working on some new financial scheme; Marmaduke was down in Kent nursing a constituency; Lionel had a love affair; Clarence was up at Oxford. Her sister Isabelle made herself the patroness of a new dance club in town, where you could play unlimited "bridge." Sanchia was alone, and she was glad to be alone.

She had come to one of those moments in life when the toys of yesterday break in one's hands. She had everything that a wealthy modern girl could want: good looks, health, money, her own car, lovers of sorts, the power to escape from anything that bored her, and yet there was some central thing that was lacking. She felt that she was playing at life, not living. The woman in her was strangely unsatisfied. There was much of her mother in Sanchia—that Mary Bawtrey who had been born in a Hampshire farmhouse, and who had died—vaguely protesting against a deluge of success.

"What is success?"

Sanchia watched the snow falling, and tried to answer the question. Did it mean money, honours, paragraphs and pictures in the papers, a feverish activity that accomplished nothing? She contemplated her brothers. They made her think of figures seen always in profile, distinguished, correct, cold, detached—always moving in one direction, never looking to right or left. They went their way, a selfish, successful, unwondering way. Isabelle was like the men, always chasing something with an air of fierce, tight-lipped unenjoyment. What did

they overtake or find? Would they ever find themselves?

Sanchia went out into the snow and wandered down to the village. She was realizing that the village had a life of its own—a snug, red-cheeked, wholesome life—and it was beginning to have the fascination for her that a farmyard has for a city child. Why did not the Hall share this life? How detached they were! It had not always been so.

She found herself looking over the hedge at Sellwood's cottage. The pear tree had lost its leaves; the brown thatch was capped with snow; the great yews were crusted with it. The path had been swept to the blue door, and outside the porch a robin was picking up crumbs. Black and white—deep shadows and the whiteness of the snow—a blue plume of smoke, silence, a suggestion of mystery and yet of homeliness! She realized suddenly that the village was a place of homes.

A dog barked. A figure came out from one of the old outhouses carrying a pail. The figure turned its head and saw that other figure standing in the lane.

The girl smiled. The man raised his old green felt hat and came down the path, still carrying the pail.

"I heard you were all away."

"No," she said. "What's that? Milk?"

She had moved to the gate, and he showed her the warm, creamy milk in the pail.

"How lovely! I never see it—you know, except in silver jugs; I never see it—born."

He looked at her with a slight frown.

"Would it interest you? I mean——"

She spoke quickly.

"Being successful seems to make one a sort of social outcast. We get more than we want, and yet, somehow, it always seems second-hand."

His eyes lit up.

"Back to the cow—what!" And he laughed, but his laughter had a note of tenderness. "Modern life skims off the cream, the mystery. But you can get it back—yes, you can get it back."

She stood looking gravely down at the milk in the pail.

"I wonder if you would teach me to milk."

For one moment he looked at her almost mistrustfully, as though she might be blaspheming against certain sacred things. She raised her eyes to his, and his mistrust of her melted away.

"Of course."

How fond he was of those two simple words!

From that day Sanchia's life began to flow away from Wilford Hall and to lie more and more in the life of the village. She had become a kind of self-constituted pupil of John Sellwood, and she learnt more from him than how to prune fruit trees or to milk a cow. Her womanhood warmed itself at the open fire of this simple yet subtle life, breathing in the inevitable beauty of things, the elemental joys and sufferings and toils. She began to know every corner of that queer little curtilage: the woodshed, the cow lodge, the beehives at the end of the orchard under the shelter of the holly hedge, the paddock sloping up to the Scotch firs, the well with its winch and handle under the shade of a yew, the dairy, the kitchen with its great fireplace and bacon rack, pewter and brass, the beds of polyanthus, daffodils and tulips under the windows, the little lawns and borders on either side of the brick path. Through it all she entered into the quiet life of the village, this green corner of the world where so many things were born. She began to see that its crudities were not crude—as she had thought them at one time; these people were like the apple trees, quaint but natural—they grew out of the soil.

SHE was surprised, and yet not surprised, to find how John Sellwood had won his way into the heart of the village. He had learnt much from the village, but he knew things that the village did not know.

This shabby, quiet, impecunious man—this mystic, this toiler with his hands—had a genius for giving. He gave himself, which, after all, is the noblest giving of which a man is capable.

"Go and ask Mr. Sellwood, he'll figure it out for you."

How often did Sanchia hear some such refrain as that.

As for the family, it was not interested; it did not take the adventure seriously.

"What's Sanchia's stunt?"

They supposed it was like dog-breeding or land-work, a temporary obsession, a wheeze, a new dance-step.

But there was one man who did take the affair seriously, perhaps because it had become the most serious and sacred thing in his life. It could not go on blindly. Wilford Hall and Fir Croft were not places that could amalgamate.

She ought to know. It was his duty to

make her understand that a man might care too much and too fatally for a thing that could not be his.

For some days Sellwood shirked the issue. He sought for openings and missed them. He thought that Sanchia did not suspect, whereas she, the woman, was wondering whether he would ever speak—whether he cared so much that he would dare to speak—what she would do if he did not dare.

And one day he began to tell her the tale of his life. He had made a great fire of the winter's hedge-clippings and tree-prunings, and they were standing looking into its redness as the blue dusk came down.

"I'm one of the failures, you know," he said. "I did not always live in the country. I was a junior partner in a firm of lawyers in town. I don't think I was born to be a lawyer, and when my firm went to the bad I tried something else. I failed at that, too. Then my health gave out. They told me to live an open life in the country. I scraped some money together, went as a learner on a farm, and then bought this little place. I manage to live here, and I'm happy. It's a good life, a clean life, and you can see God in things as you can't see Him in a town. But I have failed; I have to be content with myself and my dog; I can't hope to have what most men have."

Sanchia's eyes remained fixed on the fire.

"I'll tell you the tale of our family," she said. "Father was a stockbroker's clerk, my mother a farmer's daughter. Father was what you call a financial genius, which seems to mean that you speculate and get other people's money without doing anything of value. He was extraordinarily successful; the whole family is extraordinarily successful. My brothers are just like my father, only a little more so; we are the new aristocrats. I don't think that any of us have done what I call an honest day's work in our lives."

"I'll give you an impression of what my average day was like," she went on. "Probably I had breakfast in bed. My maid came and fussed me. I spent the morning loafing about. Perhaps I took my car out, or played a round of golf, or if we were in town I went out and bought something—not because I wanted it—but for just something to do. I lunched. I idled, or played some game, or went to see other people who were idle. I dressed for dinner. We dined. Sometimes I went to the theatre or a dance, or loafed till it was time to go to bed. What I call a shop-window life. We never think;

we never do anything that really matters. And one day I woke up."

Their eyes met. There was a look of pain in Sellwood's, a tenseness of self-repression on his face.

"I'm glad you woke up," he said. "You are much too good for that sort of life." Then he added: "But I'm a failure, Sanchia, in the world's eyes. I—I can't do what a man longs to do."

She turned and moved slowly away.

"I think I should like to be a failure," she said; "our family has been too horribly successful."

FOR a week Sanchia did not go near the village. She was both exultant and miserable. She knew that this man loved her, but that his sense of honour would not let him say so. It was possible that he thought her an impressionable and bored young woman who would tire of any novelty in six weeks. It was her latest craze—that was all. But Sanchia knew otherwise. She wanted a life in which things were born—the simple satisfying life her mother had led before she had married.

Spring came suddenly, like green foam left by the rolling seas of March, and to Sanchia it seemed like no other spring that she could remember. Her eyes were open; she saw so much more, felt so much more; she had escaped from the shop window into the woods. An exquisite restlessness took possession of her. She went down to Wilford village.

Sanchia bought stamps at the village post office. She was crossing the green when she saw the rector coming through the lych gate by the big yew against the churchyard wall. Their paths converged, and Sanchia became aware of a certain unfriendliness in the little man's eyes. She was piqued by it, for she felt no unfriendliness to anyone in Wilford.

They appeared to be going in the same direction: towards the lane leading up past Fir Croft. The rector had an air of aloofness, of vague discomfort. He talked about nothing in particular, and did that badly.

Then he blurted. He was a man of impulses.

"Pity we are losing Sellwood."

Sanchia's chin swept round.

"Why—he is not leaving the village?"

"He says so."

"But he mustn't."

She went red. The little man was staring at her.

"Surely you can persuade him——"

"I have tried——"

And suddenly the rector hesitated and turned back. He looked uncomfortable; he made some futile excuse about having forgotten to arrange for the christening of somebody's baby; he escaped. And somehow Sanchia felt that he had pushed a motherless idea of his own into her arms and run away.

Sanchia walked on to Sellwood's cottage, and, opening the gate, went in. She knocked at the door, but no one answered the knock. She explored the outhouses, walked round to the orchard and came quite suddenly upon Sellwood. He was sitting in the fork of an old apple tree, a man who had lost the will to work and to live.

She made no concealment of anything. She spoke to him as she would have spoken to her other self.

"Why are you leaving Wilford?"

He slid down from the fork of the tree and stood, helplessly, looking at her.

"Who told you I was leaving?"

"Is it true?"

He did not reply. His glance seemed to wander over his orchard and garden, his field and the great woods, lovingly, regretfully.

"It's absurd," she said with sudden passion. "You don't want to go; I don't want you to go. John, why don't you ask me?"

His eyes came back to hers.

"How can I?"

"Well, I shall have to do it for you. Sanchia Bawtrey, will you——"

"Stop!" he said.

He went close to her. His face had a sudden radiance.

"You generous child. Sanchia, I love you. Will you marry me?"

"Yes," she said.

They stood together under the white blossom of the tree. Sellwood held her hands.

"I have asked you, dear. I have told you the truth—but I can't let you marry me."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Dear, don't you realize that I am very poor? I could not give you a tithe of what you have up there."

"You will give me what I have never had up there," she answered; "a soul to live with."

He was shaken, though he tried to hide it.

"Sanchia, I'm a failure."

"John, I, too, want to be a failure—if you are what the world calls a failure. And I shall not come to you empty-handed. I shall bring a hundred a year; my mother left me that."

"But your people?"

"John, does a woman marry her own family? I don't belong to them. I never did."

It was a rare thing for the Bawtrey family to be pushed off the perch of its complacency; but when Sanchia made that very simple announcement: "I am going to marry John Sellwood," she challenged the sacred principle of success.

The whole family happened to be at home. They fell upon Sanchia both separately and together, and found her calm and recalcitrant. She retreated to her room, and conducted a series of interviews that were painful and significant.

THE first was with her father. He walked in without knocking, and assumed himself to be the master of her obedience before he had tested it.

"This nonsense must stop, and at once."

"I quite agree with you, dad," she said, "and it will stop directly you realize that I am in earnest."

"You are not going to marry this outsider."

"I am."

"I'll have him kicked out of Wilford."

"You can't," she said; "the little place belongs to him."

"Well, you won't get anything from me."

"I haven't asked for it."

Marmaduke came next—the budding politician, sententious, monumental.

"Sanchia, let me tell you that you can't let the family down by marrying this chap."

"You mean that he is a failure?"

"A rotten failure. You'll be damned unhappy. Besides, you might think of us."

"Do you believe," she asked, "that my marrying John Sellwood will prevent your getting a seat in the House?"

"My seat is safe enough. But you are letting the family down. The chap thinks he is going to get a lot of cash with you."

"He doesn't," she said; "but that is just the sort of thing you would say, Marmaduke."

Her sister Isabelle was the last to appear. She was bitter, excited.

"Well, I think it's the most beastly selfish thing on earth. You might consider us."

What do you think Doodles will say when he hears ? ”

Sanchia remained cold.

“ Isabelle,” she said, “ if my marriage prevents Lord Bulmer proposing to you—well, I shall think that you will have had a lucky escape. If he has so little of the real man in him——”

“ Oh, you don’t care, and you don’t understand.”

“ I do understand. All of you want me to sacrifice my happiness because you think it might interfere a little with yours. I won’t ! ”

SHE married John Sellwood, and she went to live in the little white cottage with the Tree of Heaven in its garden. She worked—she denied herself all the superfluous luxuries she had known of old—and she was happy. But the family could not understand it. Seeing that the catastrophe had happened and had to be accepted, the obvious thing to do was to take this failure by the scruff of the neck and elevate him to a seeming level of success. Sigurd proposed to buy Sellwood a farm and establish him as a gentleman farmer.

The Sellwoods refused to move. They were happy and contented where they were. They had no desire for a big farm and an appearance of success. Sigurd had his offer refused.

He was angry, and all the more so because he had believed that Sellwood’s marrying of Sanchia had been mere social blackmail.

“ The fellow counts on us doing something.”

But apparently the fellow didn’t. He was one of those hopeless persons who stood so far outside the Bawtrey scheme of life that he could neither be bribed, nor hurt, nor patronized. He simply did not seem to care for money as money, for social power and position. What could you do with a man like that ?

That was the question Sigurd put to his god, and his god could give him no answer.

Ten years passed. The Sellwoods had prospered a little in their quiet way. They had two healthy children, and Sanchia had a girl to help her in the house, and Sellwood employed a man to do the rougher work upon the land. They had their luxuries and treasures, books, some old piece of furniture they had coveted, a new tree or a new rose, an occasional week-end in town.

Up at the Hall Sigurd Bawtrey—or Lord Wilford—had grown old and lonely. The family had spread itself ; they were married.

They came to Wilford to stay, and they would go down to see Sanchia—Sanchia the mother, the woman who was very wise. People talked to Sanchia, they came and told her their troubles, and the family brought its troubles to the Madonna of the Pear Tree. Sanchia was sympathetic, and the family, blind to the humorous pathos of life, thought Sanchia a pleasant anachronism.

Marmaduke had become a political cynic. His party had treated him badly ; he had been used as a scapegoat ; he was disgruntled, disillusioned.

“ But what can you expect,” he said to Sanchia, “ in a world like this. Every man for himself. We are all going to the devil.”

Isabelle was separated from her husband. She was very bitter.

Old Sigurd, grown a lonely old dog, was always trotting down to Fir Croft. He played with the children, and sat in the sun. It seems that in these last years of his life he had a glimmering of the real vision.

“ Extraordinary ! ” he said to Sanchia one day. “ You are the only one in the family who seems to be happy.”

“ I am happy,” she answered.

He pondered it.

“ Look at them all ! They had everything that they could want. Success—too ! Isabelle got what she wanted, yet she can’t live with her man. Marmaduke is one solemn sneer. Lionel, oh—well—Lionel ! And Clarence wastes more eloquence on his wife than he does on the judge and the jury. I can’t understand it.”

And then he raised his eyes to Sanchia’s face.

“ What’s the secret ? Why are you happy ? ”

“ I think,” she said, “ I am happy because I married a man who had loved things for themselves, for their beauty and their goodness, and not for what he could get out of them. Just that. It doesn’t make for worldly success, dear——”

“ Sanchia,” said her father, “ I sometimes think I should have been a happier man if I had listened to your mother. Come to think of it—why—you are your mother over again—only you didn’t marry me ! ”

She called the two children and left them to play with him, to hang on his knees and ask questions, for it is easier to ask questions than to answer them.

Proof

Storyteller

MAY 1922

Failure

By Warwick Deeping

"... But I'm a failure, Sanchia, in the world's eyes. I—I can't do what a man longs to do."

"She turned and moved slowly away."

"'I think I should like to be a failure,' she said; 'our family has been too horribly successful.'"



THE old pear tree behind the thorn hedge was dropping its crimson leaves in the frosty November sunlight. It looked like a burning torch or a gorgeous fountain of colour, and the girl in the lane stopped to gaze at it.

"Just the colour of my new dress."

A puff of wind brought down a scattering of the crimson leaves, and as they fell the girl's eyes watched them. Some came to rest among the yellow leaves of the thorn hedge; others reached the grass and lay brilliantly upon its greenness. A moment ago the girl's face had been bored and listless, but the flaming tree, like some thing of enchantment, scattered the light from its leaves upon her face.

"Heavens," she thought, "isn't that like us! I could think of nothing but a new frock. We are most horribly crude."

Her glance left the tree and wandered rather vaguely towards the cottage to which the tree belonged. She saw it as a queer, white oblong, with its thatched roof slipping down over its sleepy eyes, and the whiteness of it laced and criss-crossed with creepers. A brick path with box edging led up to a faded blue door under a faded blue trellis porch. Several big yew trees made a dark smother about the place, and behind it an orchard and a paddock sloped upwards towards the pine-woods. On the right a knot of old

out-houses, decrepit and mellow, seemed to stand together in intimate and comfortable confabulation. The thatch of one of them looked like ragged brown fur. The red-tiled roof of another showed curves that were beautiful in their waywardness.

From one of these buildings came the sound of the sawing of wood. The sawing ceased for a moment, and a man's voice could be heard calling a dog.

"Jack, Jack—here, boy, here."

It was a pleasant voice, a voice in which laughter seemed very near.

"Hallo—you scoundrel!"

It merged into the ecstatic and affectionate sneezings and yelpings of a dog, a dog that was being fondled and was using its tongue.

The girl walked on.

"How comfortable! Human!"

That was the impression left with her, though she could hardly translate it into words. Also it left her with a look of discontent, a discontent that was not bitter, but an instructive questing after some elemental self-realization that was deep and true.

Sanchia was unhappy. It is probable that she was the only member of the Bawtreys family who was so fortunate as to be unhappy. The Bawtreys were successful people, fatally successful. They were new folk—yet even Sigurd the father had had such faith in the ascent of the family that he had given his children spacious, sounding names—Sanchia, Isabelle, Marmaduke, Lionel, Clarence. His wife had protested and died. Sanchia! She had wished to be the mother of a

Failure

Tom and a Mary, but Sigurd, that big-nosed and rampant stockbroker's clerk, had seen himself wearing a sword.

Sanchia turned in at the park gates, and her feet brushed the fallen yellow leaves. The darkness seemed to grow more intense under the autumnal branches of the oaks. Wilford Hall had become the family seat of the Bawtreys. There had been a Marquis of Wilford in Jacobean days—but the title was dead—and Sigurd intended to resuscitate it. Lord Wilford. He looked it, and he knew that he looked it. Sigurd collected Vandykes.

Sanchia went straight to her room. The Bawtreys had a house-party, and the house-party had decided for a *thé dansant* in the ballroom, but Sanchia was bored with house-parties and club dancing. She rang for her maid.

"Bring me some tea here, Sandys."

Her latest dress, a Paris frock of crimson, had been laid out on the bed. She glanced at it casually, and picking up a copy of a popular illustrated weekly she sat down in the arm-chair in front of the fire and began to turn over the pages. It was a gay paper—feverishly and forcefully gay—full of women with ivory smiles and an air of "See me—and die." In it you met the fashionable world, the theatrical world, the music-hall world, riding to hounds, blowing trumpets, showing legs. Everyone seemed to have the same smile. The pictures shouted at you: "See—here are all the successful people. Come out into the lime-light."

Sanchia threw the paper on the floor.

"Yes, that's just it," she thought; "all the successful people trying to pretend they are riotously joyous and happy. Aren't there any unsuccessful people in the world? Why not make a cult of the failures just for a change? It might be more interesting."

Sandys brought in Sanchia's tea—

and a moment before the girl's arrival Sanchia had noticed a white card propped against the Sèvres candlestick on her mantelpiece. Someone had sent the Hall folk tickets for the Wilford village dance. They were not expected to come, but they were expected to send a cheque. Sanchia had taken a ticket and forgotten all about it.

WILFORD VILLAGE CLUB.

ARMISTICE DANCE.

8.30 P.M. IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

ADMIT ONE.

Price 5s. Morning Dress.

Sanchia had reached for the card. "Sandys."

"Yes, miss?"

"Have you ever been to one of these dances?"

Sandys had become infected with the disastrous spirit of success that permeated Wilford Hall.

"No, miss. Stuffy things. No class at all."

Sanchia replaced the card on the mantelpiece.

"I see it is to-night," she said.

A sudden whim—some wayward impulse had persuaded her to go.

Sanchia dined in her room. She gave it out that she had a headache, and no one bothered her by coming to sympathize. At eight-fifteen she put on her furs, went down the servants' staircase and escaped by one of the garden doors. She walked down to Wilford under the full moon, past the old pear tree and the funny old white cottage with its eyebrows slipping over its eyes. The schoolroom was by the church. She heard music, the movement of many feet.

An old gentleman in a suit of snuff-coloured tweeds met her at the door.

"Ladies' cloak-room on right, miss."

Then he stared at her through his glasses. He knew all Wilford and

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everyone within three miles of Wilford.

"Miss Bawtreys!"

She smiled at him.

"I hope they won't mind."

"Bless me, it's an event!"

Sanchia went into the cloak-room, and the old gentleman—he was the village postmaster—hustled off to warn the master of the ceremonies.

"Mr. Sellwood, Miss Bawtreys's here!"

John Sellwood was standing near the piano, talking to the rector. He was fairish, in age about three and thirty, with the head of a mild and contemplative lion. Leisurely and quiet, he had a way of looking at strangers with a pair of unhurried blue eyes before beginning to speak.

"Miss Bawtreys! Good Lord!"

He smiled, half-apologetically, at the rector.

"Rather a shock, sir! I suppose I had better——"

The rector nodded.

Sanchia found this quiet man waiting at the door for her when she entered the schoolroom. She was just a little shy. She felt a stranger.

"It is very good of you to come, Miss Bawtreys."

They looked at each other. She recognized his voice, the pleasant voice of the man who lived in the white cottage behind the crimson pear tree.

"I wanted to. I'm afraid I am rather a stranger."

He felt her shyness, her sense of isolation, and he asked her to dance. The room had loudly encored a fox-trot. There were many eyes that were none too friendly to Sanchia. Had she come to swank?

"My name's Sellwood," he explained. "I'm sort of responsible for this show."

"Oh yes, you live at Fir Croft, don't you?"

"And I sell you eggs!"

She laughed.

"Do you! They are very good eggs."

She drifted off with him among

the village couples, over a floor that would have filled the Wilford house-party with scorn. The orchestra consisted of a piano and violin, and the music was three seasons old. Her partner had none of the new steps, but he danced with a suggestion of courtesy that was new to her. She enjoyed it, and she was surprised.

He asked her if he might find her other partners.

"Why—of course," she said. "I have come to dance."

The rector was her second partner. He waltzed in the old-fashioned way, and with an air of being greatly amused at himself doing it. He was a little ecstatic and jerky.

"Very good of you to turn up like this, Miss Bawtreys."

"I ought to have come before."

"Well, perhaps you'll come again. It was Sellwood's idea. Great man—Sellwood."

"He farms?" she asked.

"Health, you know. A man who makes the best of things. Does a little with chickens and fruit and a cow. But he's an asset."

Her eyes encouraged the rector to go on.

"Sellwood believes in the old village life, you know. May Day—and music and games, and all that sort of thing. He's hundreds of years old."

She laughed.

"He doesn't look it!" she said.

Sanchia danced again with Sellwood. She spoke to him about the pear tree, and his eyes lit up.

"Yes, isn't it gorgeous. It starts maroon, turns crimson, and then changes to a kind of rosy gold. I call it the Tree of Heaven."

"It's such a pretty old place—your cottage."

"Straight out of Hardy," he said; but she did not know who Hardy was.

Later she danced with a speechless young farmer, somebody's gardener, and the Wilford insurance agent. She was sitting out with the latter gentleman, near the

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door, when a woman in an ulster bundled in.

"I want Mr. Sellwood."

Mr. Sellwood came.

"Oh, Mr. Sellwood, we're in such a way. It's a bad case, and Dr. Smiles—he wants help—someone to go to Guildford and fetch another doctor. And we thought of you—and your little car—"

Sellwood said, "Of course. I can get going in a quarter of an hour."

He went, and with such quiet, instant cheerfulness that his going seemed the most natural thing in the world. And Sanchia suddenly remembered him and his car, a little old ancient thing which he used for carting about eggs and fruit. She could remember her brother Marmaduke sweeping past it in his big Fiat, and laughing at "the blighter in his pump-machine." But Marmaduke was treading in the footsteps of his father.

Sanchia was home at the Hall before eleven; she had paused on the way to say good night to Sellwood's Tree of Heaven. The house-party were still dancing, and she blundered upon her second brother, Lionel, and a girl, sitting out upon the stairs.

"Good Lord, Sankey, thought you were in bed! Where—the—"

She hated the nickname Sankey, and she retaliated.

"Don't be inquisitive, Moody. A bet—that's all. Keep quiet."

She went to her room laughing. She looked at herself in her glass and saw another Sanchia, a Sanchia with colour in her cheeks and eyes that were alive. Extraordinary! She had enjoyed herself at that potty little village dance, and enjoyed herself with a mysterious simplicity. She fell asleep thinking of John Sellwood's Tree of Heaven.

Next week snow fell, and Sanchia was all alone at Wilford. Sigurd was at his club, energizing some new financial scheme; Marmaduke was down in Kent nursing a constituency; Lionel had a love affair;

Clarence was up at Oxford. Her sister Isabelle made herself the patroness of a new dance club in town, where you could play unlimited "bridge." Sanchia was alone, and she was glad to be alone.

She had come to one of those moments in life when the toys of yesterday break in one's hands. She had everything that a wealthy modern girl could want: good looks, health, money, her own car, lovers of sorts, the power to escape from anything that bored her, and yet there was some central thing that was lacking. She felt that she was playing at life, not living. The woman in her was strangely unsatisfied. There was much of her mother in Sanchia—that Mary Bawtreys who had been born in a Hampshire farmhouse, and who had died—vaguely protesting against a deluge of success.

"What is success?"

Sanchia watched the snow falling, and tried to answer the question. Did it mean money, honours, paragraphs and pictures in the papers, a feverish activity that accomplished nothing? She contemplated her brothers. They made her think of figures seen always in profile, distinguished, correct, cold, detached—always moving in one direction, never looking to right or left. They went their way, a selfish, successful, unwondering way. Isabelle was like the men, always chasing something with an air of fierce, tight-lipped unenjoyment. What did they overtake or find? Would they ever find themselves?

Sanchia went out into the snow and wandered down to the village. She was realizing that the village had a life of its own—a snug, red-cheeked, wholesome life—and it was beginning to have the fascination for her that a farmyard has for a city child. Why did not the Hall share this life? How detached they were! It had not always been so.

She found herself looking over the hedge at Sellwood's cottage. The pear tree had lost its leaves; the

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brown thatch was capped with snow; the great yews were crusted with it. The path had been swept to the blue door, and outside the porch a robin was picking up crumbs. Black and white—deep shadows and the whiteness of the snow—a blue plume of smoke, silence, a suggestion of mystery and yet of homeliness! She realized suddenly that the village was a place of homes.

A dog barked. A figure came out from one of the old out-houses carrying a pail. The figure turned its head and saw that other figure standing in the lane.

The girl smiled. The man raised his old green felt hat and came down the path, still carrying the pail.

"I heard you were all away."

"No," she said; "what's that? Milk?"

She had moved to the gate, and he showed her the warm creamy milk in the pail.

"How lovely! I never see it—you know, except in silver jugs; I never see it—born."

He looked at her with a slight frown.

"Would it interest you? I mean——"

She spoke quickly.

"Being successful seems to make one a sort of social outcast. We get more than we want, and yet, somehow, it always seems second-hand."

His eyes lit up.

"Back to the cow—what!" And he laughed, but his laughter had a note of tenderness. "Modern life skims off the cream, the mystery. But you can get it back—yes, you can get it back."

She stood looking gravely down at the milk in the pail.

"I wonder if you would teach me to milk."

For one moment he looked at her almost mistrustfully, as though she might be blaspheming against certain sacred things. She raised her eyes to his, and his mistrust of her melted away.

"Of course."

How fond he was of those two simple words!

From that day Sanchia's life began to flow away from Wilford Hall and to lie more and more in the life of the village. She had become a kind of self-constituted pupil of John Sellwood, and she learnt more from him than how to prune fruit trees or to milk a cow. Her womanhood warmed itself at the open fire of this simple yet subtle life, breathing in the inevitable beauty of things, the elemental joys and sufferings and toils. She began to know every corner of that queer little curtilage: the woodshed, the cow lodge, the beehives at the end of the orchard under the shelter of the holly hedge, the paddock sloping up to the Scotch firs, the well with its winch and handle under the shade of a yew, the dairy, the kitchen with its great fireplace and bacon rack, pewter and brass, the beds of polyanthus, daffodils and tulips under the windows, the little lawns and borders on either side of the brick path. Through it all she entered into the quiet life of the village, this green corner of the world where so many things were born. She began to see that its crudities were not crude—as she had thought them at one time; these people were like the apple trees, quaint but natural—they grew out of the soil.

She was surprised, and yet not surprised, to find how John Sellwood had won his way into the heart of the village. He had learnt much from the village, but he knew things that the village did not know.

This shabby, quiet, impecunious man—this mystic, this toiler with his hands—had a genius for giving. He gave himself, which, after all, is the noblest giving of which a man is capable.

"Go and ask Mr. Sellwood, he'll figure it out for you."

How often did Sanchia hear some such refrain as that.

As for the family, it was not

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interested; it did not take the adventure seriously.

"What's Sanchia's stunt?"

They supposed it was like dog-breeding or land-work, a temporary obsession, a wheeze, a new dance-step.

But there was one man who did take the affair seriously, perhaps because it had become the most serious and sacred thing in his life. It could not go on blindly. Wilford Hall and Fir Croft were not places that could amalgamate.

She ought to know. It was his duty to make her understand that a man might care too much and too fatally for a thing that could not be his.

For some days Sellwood shirked the issue. He sought for openings and missed them. He thought that Sanchia did not suspect, whereas she, the woman, was wondering whether he would ever speak—whether he cared so much that he would dare to speak—what she would do if he did not dare.

And one day he began to tell her the tale of his life. He had made a great fire of the winter's hedge-clippings and tree-prunings, and they were standing looking into its redness as the blue dusk came down.

"I'm one of the failures, you know," he said. "I did not always live in the country. I was a junior partner in a firm of lawyers in town. I don't think I was born to be a lawyer, and when my firm went to the bad I tried something else. I failed at that, too. Then my health gave out. They told me to live an open life in the country. I scraped some money together, went as a learner on a farm, and then bought this little place. I manage to live here, and I'm happy. It's a good life, a clean life, and you can see God in things as you can't see Him in a town. But I have failed; I have to be content with myself and my dog; I can't hope to have what most men have."

Sanchia's eyes remained fixed on the fire.

"I'll tell you the tale of our family," she said. "Father was a stockbroker's clerk, my mother a farmer's daughter. Father was what you call a financial genius, which seems to mean that you speculate and get other people's money without doing anything of value. He was extraordinarily successful; the whole family is extraordinarily successful. My brothers are just like my father, only a little more so; we are the new aristocrats. I don't think that any of us have done what I call an honest day's work in our lives.

"I'll give you an impression of what my average day was like," she went on. "Probably I had breakfast in bed. My maid came and fussed me. I spent the morning loafing about. Perhaps I took my car out, or played a round of golf, or if we were in town I went out and bought something—not because I wanted it—but for just something to do. I lunched. I idled, or played some game, or went to see other people who were idle. I dressed for dinner. We dined. Sometimes I went to the theatre or a dance, or loafed till it was time to go to bed. What I call a shop-window life. We never think; we never do anything that really matters. And one day I woke up."

Their eyes met. There was a look of pain in Sellwood's, a tenseness of self-repression on his face.

"I'm glad you woke up," he said. "You are much too good for that sort of life." Then he added: "But I'm a failure, Sanchia, in the world's eyes. I—I can't do what a man longs to do."

She turned and moved slowly away.

"I think I should like to be a failure," she said; "our family has been too horribly successful."

For a week Sanchia did not go near the village. She was both exultant and miserable. She knew that this man loved her, but that his sense of honour would not let him say so. It was possible that he

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thought her an impressionable and bored young woman who would tire of any novelty in six weeks. It was her latest craze—that was all. But Sanchia knew otherwise. She wanted a life in which things were born—the simple satisfying life her mother had led before she had married.

Spring came suddenly, like green foam left by the rolling seas of March, and to Sanchia it seemed like no other spring that she could remember. Her eyes were open; she saw so much more, felt so much more; she had escaped from the shop window into the woods. An exquisite restlessness took possession of her. She went down to Wilford village.

Sanchia bought stamps at the village post office. She was crossing the green when she saw the rector coming through the lych gate by the big yew against the churchyard wall. Their paths converged, and Sanchia became aware of a certain unfriendliness in the little man's eyes. She was piqued by it, for she felt no unfriendliness to anyone in Wilford.

They appeared to be going in the same direction: towards the lane leading up past Fir Croft. The rector had an air of aloofness, of vague discomfort. He talked about nothing in particular, and did that badly.

Then he blurted. He was a man of impulses.

"Pity we are losing Sellwood."

Sanchia's chin swept round.

"Why—he is not leaving the village?"

"He says so."

"But he mustn't."

She went red. The little man was staring at her.

"Surely you can persuade him—"

"I have tried——"

And suddenly the rector hesitated and turned back. He looked uncomfortable; he made some futile excuse about having forgotten to arrange for the christening of some-

body's baby; he escaped. And somehow Sanchia felt that he had pushed a motherless idea of his own into her arms and run away.

Sanchia walked on to Sellwood's cottage, and, opening the gate, went in. She knocked at the door, but no one answered the knock. She explored the out-houses, walked round to the orchard and came quite suddenly upon Sellwood. He was sitting in the fork of an old apple tree, a man who had lost the will to work and to live.

She made no concealment of anything. She spoke to him as she would have spoken to her other self.

"Why are you leaving Wilford?"

He slid down from the fork of the tree and stood, helplessly, looking at her.

"Who told you I was leaving?"

"Is it true?"

He did not reply. His glance seemed to wander over his orchard and garden, his field and the great woods, lovingly, regretfully.

"It's absurd," she said with sudden passion. "You don't want to go; I don't want you to go. John, why don't you ask me?"

His eyes came back to hers.

"How can I?"

"Well, I shall have to do it for you. Sanchia Bawtrey, will you——"

"Stop!" he said.

He went close to her. His face had a sudden radiance.

"You generous child. Sanchia, I love you. Will you marry me?"

"Yes," she said.

They stood together under the white blossom of the tree. Sellwood held her hands.

"I have asked you, dear. I have told you the truth—but I can't let you marry me."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Dear, don't you realize that I am very poor? I could not give you a tithe of what you have up there."

"You will give me what I have never had up there," she answered; "a soul to live with."

He was shaken, though he tried to hide it.

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"Sanchia, I'm a failure."

"John, I, too, want to be a failure—if you are what the world calls a failure. And I shall not come to you empty-handed. I shall bring a hundred a year; my mother left me that."

"But your people?"

"John, does a woman marry her own family? I don't belong to them. I never did."

It was a rare thing for the Bawtreys family to be pushed off the perch of its complacency; but when Sanchia made that very simple announcement: "I am going to marry John Sellwood," she challenged the sacred principle of success.

The whole family happened to be at home. They fell upon Sanchia both separately and together, and found her calm and recalcitrant. She retreated to her room, and conducted a series of interviews that were painful and significant.

The first was with her father. He walked in without knocking, and assumed himself to be the master of her obedience before he had tested it.

"This nonsense must stop, and at once."

"I quite agree with you, dad," she said, "and it will stop directly you realize that I am in earnest."

"You are not going to marry this outsider."

"I am."

"I'll have him kicked out of Wilford."

"You can't," she said; "the little place belongs to him."

"Well, you won't get anything from me."

"I haven't asked for it."

Marmaduke came next — the budding politician, sententious, monumental.

"Sanchia, let me tell you that you can't let the family down by marrying this chap."

"You mean that he is a failure?"

"A rotten failure. You'll be damned unhappy. Besides, you might think of us."

"Do you believe," she asked, "that

my marrying John Sellwood will prevent your getting a seat in the House?"

"My seat is safe enough. But you are letting the family down. The chap thinks he is going to get a lot of cash with you."

"He doesn't," she said; "but that is just the sort of thing you would say, Marmaduke."

Her sister Isabelle was the last to appear. She was bitter, excited.

"Well, I think it's the most beastly selfish thing on earth. You might consider us. What do you think Doodles will say when he hears?"

Sanchia remained cold.

"Isabelle," she said, "if my marriage prevents Lord Bulmer proposing to you—well, I shall think that you will have had a lucky escape. If he has so little of the real man in him—"

"Oh, you don't care, and you don't understand."

"I do understand. All of you want me to sacrifice my happiness because you think it might interfere a little with yours. I won't!"

She married John Sellwood, and she went to live in the little white cottage with the Tree of Heaven in its garden. She worked—she denied herself all the superfluous luxuries she had known of old—and she was happy. But the family could not understand it. Seeing that the catastrophe had happened and had to be accepted, the obvious thing to do was to take this failure by the scruff of the neck and elevate him to a seeming level of success. Sigurd proposed to buy Sellwood a farm and establish him as a gentleman farmer.

The Sellwoods refused to move. They were happy and contented where they were. They had no desire for a big farm and an appearance of success. Sigurd had his offer refused.

He was angry, and all the more so because he had believed that Sellwood's marrying of Sanchia had been mere social blackmail.

By Warwick Deeping

"The fellow counts on us doing something."

But apparently the fellow didn't. He was one of those hopeless persons who stood so far outside the Bawtreys' scheme of life that he could neither be bribed, nor hurt, nor patronized. He simply did not seem to care for money as money, for social power and position. What could you do with a man like that?

That was the question Sigurd put to his god, and his god could give him no answer.

Ten years passed. The Sellwoods had prospered a little in their quiet way. They had two healthy children, and Sanchia had a girl to help her in the house, and Sellwood employed a man to do the rougher work upon the land. They had their luxuries and treasures, books, some old piece of furniture they had coveted, a new tree or a new rose, an occasional week-end in town.

Up at the hall Sigurd Bawtreys—or Lord Wilford—had grown old and lonely. The family had spread itself; they were married.

They came to Wilford to stay, and they would go down to see Sanchia—Sanchia the mother, the woman who was very wise. People talked to Sanchia, they came and told her their troubles, and the family brought its troubles to the Madonna of the Pear Tree. Sanchia was sympathetic, and the family, blind to the humorous pathos of life, thought Sanchia a pleasant anachronism.

Marmaduke had become a political cynic. His party had treated him badly; he had been used as a scapegoat; he was disgruntled, disillusioned.

"But what can you expect," he said to Sanchia, "in a world like this. Every man for himself. We are all going to the devil."

Isabelle was separated from her husband. She was very bitter.

"When I found it all out—about that other woman, I mean—he had the cheek to turn round and say it

was my fault. Said it was because I wouldn't have children and was always gadding about. Men are hopeless!"

Lionel was a man about town, rather dissipated, and without a single illusion left to live on. Clarence had achieved a career at the bar, but his home life was a cheerless compromise.

Old Sigurd, grown a lonely old dog, was always trotting down to Fir Croft. He played with the children, and sat in the sun. It seems that in these last years of his life he had a glimmering of the real vision.

"Extraordinary!" he said to Sanchia one day. "You are the only one in the family who seems to be happy."

"I am happy," she answered.

He pondered it.

"Look at them all! They had everything that they could want. Success—too! Isabelle got what she wanted, yet she can't live with her man. Marmaduke is one solemn sneer. Lionel, oh—well—Lionel! And Clarence wastes more eloquence on his wife than he does on the judge and the jury. I can't understand it."

And then he raised his eyes to Sanchia's face.

"What's the secret? Why are you happy?"

"I think," she said, "I am happy because I married a man who had loved things for themselves, for their beauty and their goodness, and not for what he could get out of them. Just that. It doesn't make for worldly success, dear—"

"Sanchia," said her father, "I sometimes think I should have been a happier man if I had listened to your mother. Come to think of it—why—you are your mother over again—only you didn't marry me!"

She called the two children and left them to play with him, to hang on his knees and ask questions, for it is easier to ask questions than to answer them.

WARWICK DEEPING.

The House That Fought

By Warwick Deeping

"Her calmness steadied him.

"I'll begin from the beginning," he said. "The very first day I felt what was in that house. It was full of something that was alive—something one couldn't see. For a family like ours to crowd into it was an outrage. I told them so; of course, they laughed."



THE wind blew. Even the deep valley was troubled by it, and the tops of the trees bent to the north-east. The foliage was ruffled like the long fur of an animal, or water where two currents meet and contend. The lower boughs of the beech trees, swaying up and down, almost brushed with their fingers last year's leaves.

The girl had come to the oak swing-gate at the end of the beech wood, and she paused there, leaning on the gate and looking down into the valley. On this grey, windy day the whole landscape seemed to be moving; the clouds raced overhead, the woods on the far side of the valley seemed to stoop and climb the hill; even the lengthening grass in the meadows seemed to be running with the wind. There was only one object in the landscape that looked solid and unmovable, a grey stone house standing in the bottom of the valley, like a rock with the green seas breaking about it.

The girl's eyes narrowed. She was dark, thin, a little defiant, with a sensitive mouth and nostrils. As she looked down at the house in the valley, her two hands gripped the top of the gate, so that her blue veins and the tendons stood out.

"I can't believe it," she said aloud; "I can't believe it."

A great gust shook the branches above the gate, and the trees seemed to laugh.

"Be quiet!" she said with a quick, fierce turn of the head. "New people! You ought to understand."

Presently she passed through the gate and walked down through the waving grass to the house among the beech trees. The house was known as Buckholt Farm, and the girl lived there. Her name was Ann Shenstone. Shenstones had lived at Buckholt for three hundred years, for the first Shenstone who had come to live in those parts had built it.

Everything about the house was of grey stone, the walls, the roof, the mullions, the garden paths, the gate pillars, the sun-dial in the garden, the octagonal chimneys. There were patches of yellow lichen on the roof. One high-pitched gable was shaggy with Virginia creeper that turned carmine in autumn. A vine, roses, and a white clematis interweaved themselves on the south wall. The door was of oak and studded with nails; the casements leaded in squares and still carrying much of the original glass. Below the walled garden lay a great pool that had been made by damming the stream that ran down the valley, and on the farther side century-old beech trees threw their shadows across the water. Behind the house, and ranged round a paved yard, were the farm buildings, all of grey stone, and as old as the house.

The girl entered the garden by way of the farmyard, through an arched doorway in one of the walls. She stood looking at the house as one sometimes looks at a thing that is familiar, yet suddenly and

The House That Fought

eternally strange. It was almost as though the house had spoken:

"I am I. Look at me well. Have you the eyes that see?"

Her answer was a cry of the heart.

"I love you. It's monstrous—shameful. Do you feel it as I do?"

Sudden sunlight touched the place. It seemed to smile, with a glimmer of its eyes.

"I have always been loved," it said.

The sunlight fled with the clouds and the wind, and the house's temper changed.

"Three hundred years! Let these new machine-made people come! I am stronger than they."

A house, grey, grim, shaggy, indomitable, clutching a great stone in its fist—waiting for the new and noisy people of a new and noisy world!

The lattices of one of the lower windows opened.

"Ann——"

It was her father, Adam Shenstone, with his little vandyke beard and blue, short-sighted eyes, a man who was both old and ill. His right hand held a pinkish bit of paper; he fluttered it at her a little impatiently.

"They are coming to-day. They may be here any-minute."

She knew what he meant, but she went to the window, took the telegram, and read it.

"Will view house this afternoon."

"GORRINGE."

A little flicker of emotion passed across her face. She folded the telegram, and continued to refold it until it was a narrow strip, and she kept drawing this strip to and fro between her fingers.

"Who are they?"

Her father was lighting his pipe.

"How should I know! Those agents at Wanbury wrote about them—said they had recommended the place to the man Gorringe."

"How hateful," she said slowly; "and yet—it has to be."

She was about to enter the house when she heard a sound that was so rare in the valley that she turned instantly to listen. Her father, still loitering at the window and puffing at his pipe, leant out with a frown of resentment.

"What's that?"

"A car," she said; "their car—I suppose."

She remained by the stone porch, watching the private road that reached Buckholt by winding across the meadows, but the car was nearer to her than she imagined. It appeared suddenly from behind the orchard, a long, grey car with a gleaming snout, and packed full of people. A small girl with a red face, bobbed hair, and hard blue eyes was standing up in it and exclaiming in a high-pitched, peevish voice:

"What a funny place! Don't those chimneys look silly."

Ann Shenstone was very sensitive to impressions, too sensitive perhaps for her own peace of soul. She felt almost as quickly as she saw. She had lived a wild, elvish life, and even since childhood she had given names to things—queer, expressive names that translated into sound the impress of the outer world upon her inner consciousness.

"Meow." She christened the child by the cry of a cat.

The car was disgorging the Gorringe family, and she stood there in the porch and watched them with calm hostility—these people who might take what the last of the Shenstones were losing. There were four men and the child. They made a cheerful noise as they disembarked, and their voices were big, and full, and rosy. The father—and three sons; she guessed that at once.

One of the younger men came up the path to the house. He had thick lips, and the lower lip was lax and everted.

"Excuse me—thith is Buckholt?"

She nicknamed him "Thop-thop," and the name fitted Gordon

Gorringer like a glove. He had not raised his cap.

Ann nodded, her nostrils quivering.

"We have come to view."

She gave him a second nod, and then disappeared into the house.

She found her father resting his head on his hands, and she was smitten through with pity.

"I'll see them. Stay here."

She closed the door, and returning to the hall, stood waiting and watching. The elder Gorringer was being helped off with his coat, and she saw him as a round man, round of head, face, and figure, white hair cropped close, his face heavy and coarse and good-natured. She heard his voice, and his voice named him as it had named the others. He was "Honk-Honk." The child with bobbed hair had trampled through the flower beds surrounding the sun-dial and was trying to pull the dial from the pillar.

Ann's eyes gleamed.

"Don't touch that!"

One of the young men had seen what she had seen. He had been standing apart from the others, looking at the house.

"Flo, come here."

The child made a face at him. He crossed the grass, and, looking at her steadily, said something that Ann could not hear.

"Only little pigs trample on flowers."

Ann looked more attentively at this youngest of the Gorringers. His name was Peter, and he was different from the others. He was thin and darkish; they were fat and fair; his eyes had an inward brightness, while the eyes of the others were dull and staring. He seemed to hold himself a little apart; he looked quickly yet understandingly at the things about him, as though he loved them and knew their language. The others were machine-made men, full of deadly complacencies, smooth reactions to the click of a lever, oiled, insensitive. Peter was not.

The whole party moved up to the house, but Ann noticed that Peter remained behind, looking up at the gables and chimneys, and across the ruffled silver of the pool to the wind-swept beeches. She found herself talking to Mr. Gorringer, Senior. These men seemed to stare at her as though she were some strange animal.

"You got our wire?"

She nodded.

"We want to go over the house and the farm. Me and my boys are looking for a little place for 'untin' and shootin'."

"You would like to see the house first?"

"We won't drag you round, miss. Fact is, I like to go round on my own, and take m' time over it."

"And poke your pen-knife into the beams," she thought, "to see if they are rotten."

She turned to the dining-room. She looked haughty, on edge.

"I will ask you to glance in here first. My father is not well——"

Mr. Gorringer's heavy face creased itself with kindness. He was a good-natured beast—stupid, utterly material, a man of money and machines.

"Sorry. Just give me a look of this room and we won't bother you again."

"Thank you," she said.

He walked in, gave Mr. Shenstone a trumpeting and cheerful "Good day," stood stolidly staring, and then walked out again. Ann called the servant and sent her off with the family as guide, and she was in the act of opening the dining-room door when Peter Gorringer appeared in the hall.

They looked at each other.

"Do you mind——?" he asked, and she saw that his eyes were shy.

"Your people have gone upstairs."

"I don't want to be with them," he said; "in a house like this."

She withdrew her hand from the door-handle, and Peter Gorringer's eyes glanced from her to the paneling on the walls. He was smiling,

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and she saw his profile against the light.

"Wonderful!" he said; "this old Jacobean wood. It seems a shame."

She bridled.

"I beg your pardon——"

He turned to her quickly, almost appealingly.

"Good lord! how this house must hate us."

"Not more than I do."

"Of course. I suppose your people have been here——"

"Three hundred years."

"I wish——" he began, and then stood silent a moment. "Houses have souls, you know."

Her hand had returned to the handle of the door.

"Yes. If you could persuade them—that child—not to make so much noise."

"Noise! They don't know they are making a noise. The family is like that. I'll try."

And that is all that Ann and Peter saw of each other that day, for the Gorrings family, having tramped into every room and out-house, and spent an hour exploring the wild and weedy loveliness of the farm, got in its car and vanished out of the valley.

"The old place will do us all right," said the father.

"Get five hundred knocked off the price, dad."

"Peter, if he is so cracked on farming, can run the farm."

The voice of Peter was heard from the back seat.

"I'm against taking it."

"Thop-thop" turned on him brusquely.

"What for? Ain't it artistic and ramshackle enough?"

"It won't love us. Houses have to be humoured."

A roar of laughter went up from the family.

"What bally rot you do talk! If you ask me, I shall pull down all that beastly panelling, put in an electric light plant—you could work it from that sluice——"

"All right," said Peter; "but I

shan't be there. I don't want to be hated by a house like that."

When these people had gone Ann had a strange feeling that the house was angry. The strength of the wind increased towards evening, and she went out into the woods and listened to the tumult in the tree tops. As she turned homewards a rush of stormy sunlight broke through in the west, and she saw the windows of the house all red with it, and for the moment she was frightened, thinking it on fire. She had reason for this fear. Had she not heard her father cry out in a moment of bitterness: "I would rather burn the place."

She hurried home. She found Adam Shenstone sitting in the oak chair beside the fireplace; the room was growing grey with the dusk, and he was so still that she had another moment of fear. She crept in, holding her breath, to find his eyes wide open and awake, and fixed on her questioningly.

"Listen. Can you hear?"

"What?" she asked with a little shiver of awe.

"It groans like a ship in a storm. I heard something break somewhere. Go and see."

She went, and in the drawing-room Ann found that the big portrait of Nigel Shenstone had fallen and was lying face downwards on the floor.

The Gorrings family bought Buckholt Farm just as it stood, and the Shenstones went into rooms at Wanbury, and Adam Shenstone died there.

"I might as well have died in the old place," he said to Ann on the night before he passed over.

And Ann felt bitter and defiant. She stayed on at Wanbury, not knowing what else to do, for though her life had been dragged up by the roots she could not detach herself from the country that she knew and loved so well. Ann had been out to look at a cottage and some

land on the other side of Wanbury, and returning to her rooms noticed a bicycle leaning against the churchyard railings opposite her windows. Her landlady met her in the narrow hall.

"There's a gentleman in the parlour, wanting to see you."

"Who is it?"

"A Mr. Gorringer—Mr. Peter Gorringer."

She went in, and he jumped up.

"You'll forgive me coming like this. I had to. IT'S the house. I wondered whether you would come over—"

"Has anything happened?"

"I'll tell you. I went to Burgess and managed to get your address."

"But why come to me?"

"Well, you know, it is rather tragic, though I did warn them. Of course they thought I was dotty; the family always thinks anything that is not as obvious as a haystack—idiotic—"

"Please sit down," she said calmly; "smoke, if you like."

"Thanks."

Her calmness steadied him.

"I'll begin from the beginning," he said. "The very first day I felt what was in that house. It was full of something that was alive—something one couldn't see. For a family like ours to crowd into it was an outrage. I told them so; of course, they laughed."

"Well, we went in. I had made up my mind to keep away, not because I was afraid of the house; I felt somehow that it wouldn't mind me. I love things, old things that are grown over with memories; so few of the moderns have any reverence. They make some tin-pot machine and call it 'progress.' Then I grew curious; I went down with the family."

He paused, lit his pipe, and let it go out. His eyes seemed fixed on some distant object.

"You saw the family. Stolid stuff—stupid. Not the sort of people to be jumpy, nothing psychic about them. I don't hold any brief

for the family; the pater is the best of the lot, but he brought us up to worship the Golden Calf. It was a very still night that first night of ours in the house, not a breath of wind. I had that little panelled room over the porch, and I couldn't sleep. I felt something, and presently I heard something, a queer sort of sound like a wind blowing through a trap-door. It came and it went. Just as though the house were drawing deep and angry breaths. Presently I fell asleep and did not wake until I was called. The family came down to breakfast looking cross; it did not say much. One of my brothers remarked that the place must be full of rats. Flo, the child, who had one of the maids sleeping in the same room, asked who the lady was who had walked into the room in the middle of the night. Flo was a modern child; if you talked to Flo about fairies she used to put out her tongue at you—"

He paused. Ann's eyes were fixed questioningly upon his face.

"Why do you speak of the child as though—"

"She's dead."

"Dead!"

"The house killed her. You know, it sounds a horrible thing to say, Miss Shenstone, but I don't blame the house."

"But—how?"

He paused and moistened his lips.

"Do you remember that big attic?"

She nodded.

"There was a swing in it, fastened to a beam."

"Yes, father put it up for me—years ago—for fun on wet days."

"Do you remember where the window was?"

"Yes; when you swung high you could almost touch it with your toes."

He uttered a sharp cry.

"That's it. The place had been scrubbed out, and the window left open for the floor to dry. The kid must have got hold of that swing."

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We found one rope broken, and Flo lying under a lilac bush in that bit of garden at the back. The rope must have broken just as she was swinging forward, and she was thrown through the window."

Ann held her breath. She was horrified, and yet not horrified.

"She was dead?"

"Quite dead."

There was a short silence.

"That was a week ago. Two days afterwards the servants left—said the place was haunted. Was it like that in your time?"

She looked at him steadily.

"No. It was what I call a happy house."

"That's what I feel," he said.

"You were part of it, you loved it, just as I love it——"

"You love it?"

"I'm afraid I'm on the side of the house," he said, "for the house has a soul."

"You know that big beech tree just across the footbridge?"

"The one with the dead bough?"

"That's it. And you know what a still day it was yesterday, not a breath of wind. My eldest brother—Gordon—was standing under that tree throwing stones at a poor little devil of a moorhen, when the tree dropped its dead bough on him."

"Killed him?"

"No. It smashed up his shoulder and right arm."

He rose and stood looking out of the window at the grey church tower rising above the yews, and at the dim green quietude of the old churchyard. Ann could understand that the heart of him had been deeply stirred, that he had been suffering some inward conflict, a struggle between pity, horror, a love of all that was beautiful, a vague sense of loyalty to the people of his own blood, and a hatred of them that was instinctive.

"Mystery, always mystery," he said, "and people who will not understand. It seems a horrible thing that a child should be killed like that, and yet, you know, she

was evil—she would have grown up into a hard, vulgar, greedy woman. Where was I? Oh, talking about Gordon. He always was a cruel beast, and I don't pity him at all. But the pater—— Well, all last night the house was full of strange noises, inexplicable noises. In your time—was it like that?"

She shook her head.

"No."

"Last night finished it. I tell you, the family is frightened. It is the first time in my life that I have ever seen them frightened. They are clearing out to-day and coming over here to Wanbury to stay at the White Hart. The pater swears that he will never go back."

"And you?" she asked.

He smiled faintly.

"I am going back. I'm not afraid. I think I fell in love with the old place that very first day. I don't think it will be angry with me, especially if you will come and tell it——"

He turned, and they stood looking at each other, and in that moment something was born in the hearts and the eyes of both of them. They were of the same blood and the same spirit; they loved the same things.

"I'll come," she said.

They left their bicycles against the orchard fence where the boughs drooped under their burden of fruit, and walked to the gate in the low stone wall. It was sunset. The tops of the beeches were aflame and the whole valley full of a vapour of gold. The stillness was complete. The pool lay like glass, splashed with movements of yellow light. They looked at the house, outlined against the sunset, and it seemed to have an aureole of fire. It was at peace, silent, tranquil.

Peter drew deep breaths.

"Look at it," he said. "I'll swear there is nothing evil about that house. I think it is ugliness that makes one feel evil and angry, ugly people, ugly voices, ugly souls. The house was angry, and it fought."

By Warwick Deeping

They entered the garden, and paused by the sun-dial.

"Speak to it."

"Dear house," she said, "I love you, and here is someone who will love you."

He held out his hand to her, and she understood. They went in together, into the brown silence of those panelled rooms where the sunlight slanted through the casements and touched the old furniture and the floors. Still holding hands they passed up the oak stairs and into those rooms where all the Shenstones had been born, had slept, and had died. They stood for a moment reverently in each room, saying nothing, but feeling the spirit of the place silent, and peaceful, and beautiful once more.

Twilight was falling when they came down again into the hall, and here they forgot the house for a moment and became conscious of each other.

"It was good of you to come," he said. "Tell me, and be quite honest, if it does not make you feel bitter, my being here?"

"No," she said, "not you."

She walked out into the garden, and he followed her.

"Shall I ride back with you?"

"Oh, don't bother. You have got to look after the house, you know. Houses feel lonely."

His eyes lit up.

"I want to stay on here and farm. I can take the place over from the pater. You'll come sometimes——"

She had reached the gate.

"I would like to come to-morrow—and see—that you and the house agree."

"Do," he said. "I'm going to have a shot at cooking my own supper. I know they think me mad."

"I'm glad some of us are mad. Good night, Mr. Gorringe."

"I hate that name. Make it Peter."

She smiled.

"I will."

He stood at the gate and watched

her disappear behind the apple trees.

Ann had another visitor that night, Peter's father. She found him in her room, sitting by the lamp, a man whom sorrow had softened. He had a slightly bewildered and resentful air, for he had received a shock—a shock that he could not understand; life had always been so solid and practical, and for once he had pushed outside the iron fence of his machine-made world.

"You've been down there?" he asked, fidgeting with his hat.

"Yes."

He looked at her with his heavy eyes as though his dull mind included her in its fear and hatred of the house.

"You know what happened?"

She nodded.

"I can't understand," he said.

"Of course, what the boy says is absurd, but I wouldn't go inside the place again. Just rank bad luck, but I don't believe in touching your luck when it's bad. He's staying there, is he?"

"Yes."

He frowned, and seemed shy of asking her the question that was in his mind.

"He will be quite safe there," she added, "I'm sure."

"I don't see why."

"He loves the house."

Mr. Gorringe got up.

"Pshaw! it's rot, Miss Shenstone, rot! I don't believe in such things."

"I'm afraid I do," she said.

He turned at the door and looked at her a little sheepishly.

"I've wasted a lot of money. But I'd like to know whether anything like that ever happened before?"

"I think—never."

He opened the door.

"Yes, what rot!" he remarked, "but I'm not going back there, thank you. I'm a Christian, I'm a humane man; I've got some sentiment. It beats me how Peter can

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pretend to like the place—after that kid's death."

"Peter's different—somehow—from the rest of you, Mr. Gorringe," she said gently.

He gave her a mistrustful look, and closed the door.

Ann was up early next morning. She had slept badly, for her mind was full of the happenings at Buckholt and of the mystery and the terror that had attached themselves so suddenly to this house that had been to her so familiar and so unfearful.

It was a still September morning, and she rode down to Buckholt through a cloud of white mist. The sun was touching the grey chimneys and the tops of the beech trees when she reached the orchard; the grass and the hedges were grey with gossamer and with dew. She saw the heavy oak door standing open. There was no movement, no sound.

She walked up the stone path and stood still. How silent everything seemed, so silent that she had a moment of fear, while she looked into the eyes of the house as she would have looked into the eyes of a creature that was intelligent and alive.

"You haven't hurt him?" she asked in thought.

But she was afraid. She passed in, and standing in the hall, stood listening, her eyes wide, and shadowy, and strange. All the doors were hanging open, and she had glimpses of the different rooms, empty and quiet. Then, quite suddenly, she heard a man's voice break out into the opening stanza of a song.

"Thank God!" she said.

She laughed. She had not realized till laughter came to her how tense the strain had been for those few moments. His voice was coming from the kitchen, and she walked down the stone-paved passage and looked in.

He was sitting straddle-legged on a Windsor chair in front of the fire, cooking his breakfast, and his singing voice had drowned the sound

of her feet. She smiled and was about to creep away, when he turned suddenly and saw her.

"Ann——!"

He jumped up, and she stood confused.

"I wanted to be sure," she said.

"Why, I have never had a more peaceful night in my life. The old place sang me to sleep. Oh, it's a cradle, a great stout ship——"

"Heavens!" she cried, "your breakfast's burning!"

He whipped round and snatched at the saucepan.

"Scrambled eggs! Oh, gemini, just in time, I think. Excuse me stirring; I'm rather proud of my scrambled eggs. I say, it was good of you to ride down like this. Surely you weren't worried?"

"A little," she said, standing rather stiff and straight.

"I wasn't—not a bit. I say, have you had breakfast?"

"I had a cup of tea and a biscuit——"

"Have breakfast with me, do, please?"

She laughed. He was stirring hard at his scrambled eggs and looking at her with happy eyes.

"You will?" he said. "It's as it should be—somehow."

They sat down to breakfast in the old brown dining-room, Ann taking the tea-tray, Peter the bread and the dish of scrambled eggs. Outside the white mist lifted suddenly and the sun came through. A sudden breeze shook the trees.

Peter held up the bread-knife.

"Listen! Do you hear?"

"The wind?"

"Yes, but the old house is laughing. Can't you hear it?"

"I think I can," she said.

He served the eggs with great seriousness.

"It's got you back," he said, and then a sudden shyness overtook them both.

But in a little while the house that had fought won the last of the Shenstones back for good.

WARWICK DEEPING.

Mr. Yen's Debt

By Warwick Deeping

"... Presently he began to speak, and with such gentleness and wisdom that even this young man's love could not be hurt. "The soul of her must be proved," was what he said, 'and I, your father's friend, will prove it. My son, you must trust me.'"



YOUNG FERROL hung over the rail of Hungerford Bridge, and the October dusk changed to blue night. The river, sliding beneath his feet, lost itself in opalescent mist and disappeared under the lights of the next bridge, lights that were a chain of yellow burrs clinging to the blue haze. London was putting on

her brilliants and giving a touch of colour to her lips before going out into the glare and the darkness to trouble men's hearts with her mocking eyes.

People hurried over the bridge, people who were going home. Ferrol had no home. He rented a bedroom in a street off Tottenham Court Road.

"Who the devil cares!"

He had got beyond thinking that people ought to care. They didn't; that was the crude fact. The other immediate facts were that he received a shilling an hour at the Belgrave Rooms for acting as a dancing instructor; that his army gratuity had gone; that he was in love.

Impulse moved him on. He remembered that he had a hole in one sock, and that he would have to buy another pair before changing for the nightly dance at the rooms. Instructors were expected to turn up and add to their laundry bill by dancing encouragement into the company's patronesses. A nice job for a man who had been three

times wounded and had won the M.C. and bar! He idled on; but above the entrance to Charing Cross station he paused again and stood looking down into a gulf of light. He was conscious of brilliant transparencies, colours of red, blue and white, a swirl of fore-shortened figures being sucked into the mouth of the tube station. Trams clanged and rumbled. A train panted out of Charing Cross and away across the bridge. Ferrol saw a girl stand for a moment and look up, her face a speck of pallor at the bottom of that luminous pit. The sex of her shot up a flame at him. She disappeared. He walked on.

Ferrol felt himself so utterly alone, and there were moments when the loneliness of London terrified him and fell on him like a panic. Supposing he hadn't a penny in his pocket, nothing to eat, nowhere to go? Supposing Kitty married that middle-aged ass with a mouthful of teeth and a Rolls-Royce car? He paused at the top of the staircase leading down into Villiers Street, and something else passed behind him in the shadow of the passage. That something had been following Ferrol all the afternoon, patiently, carefully, with the bland persistence of fate.

Ferrol bought a new pair of black socks, went to his room and changed, and walked to Belgrave Square, wearing an army greatcoat that had been dyed a dark navy blue. He carried his dancing pumps, one in each pocket. London was brilliant, derisively brilliant, and Ferrol fell to thinking of those swaggering days when he had been home on

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leave, and this same greatcoat had sat on him with a jolly adventurousness, and hung itself up at Moon's and the Piccadilly Hotel. Poor old coat! It had had such a fondness for taxis, but now——! A sausage roll and a glass of milk, and a pair of shabby pumps in its pockets!

The porter at the Belgrave Rooms opened one of the glass doors for Ferrol.

"Evenin', sir."

"Evening—Pakenham."

The porter—an ex-soldier—was about to close the door when a car drew up outside the white portico. A man got out of the car and ascended the steps. Pakenham stared at him. "Another of these dashed Chinks!" London was full of Orientals; they came to the Belgrave Rooms, and to Pakenham they all looked exactly alike.

"Gentlemen's cloak-room on the right."

The Chinaman nodded. He might have been any age; he had a face like a serene and shrewd full moon, he was perfectly dressed, and he carried himself with dignity. He left his overcoat and opera hat in the cloak-room, bought a ticket at the office, and strolled into the lounge at the bottom of the red-carpeted stairs leading to the ball-room. The lounge was full of people in evening dress. The Chinaman found a seat in a corner, and sat there watching the crowd.

He saw young Ferrol standing at the bottom of the staircase furiously irresolute, a young Prometheus chained. Ferrol could not keep still. Once he turned and went half-way up the stairs, only to come down again. He lit a cigarette, threw it into one of the palm pots, and lit another. And all this because of a girl, a girl with a brilliant pallor, a pair of red lips, and a mop of blue-black hair.

She was talking to a middle-aged man in gold-rimmed glasses, a man who smiled an eternal and foolishly fascinated smile, a man who was

so obviously besotted that even his teeth looked irresponsibly bemused. When the girl smiled he smiled; when she became serious his face seemed to fall into vacant ruinous gloom. Ferrol was watching them. This thing was his rival.

The Chinaman rose. He strolled through the crowd and placed himself near the couple. He heard what the man said.

"Simply rippin'—you know. She'll do seventy to the hour, and you wouldn't know you were moving. Not quite as lovely as your dancing—what! Oh, you must come along in her—lunch at Brighton, and back in time for a hop at the Cri."

They moved towards the staircase, and at the bottom of the staircase the Oriental saw a hand thrust out, its fingers closed on the girl's arm. She turned sharply, almost angrily, and looked into the eyes of Ferrol.

"I want to speak to you."

She nodded and smiled at her devotee.

"See you upstairs."

The Chinaman had turned his back. He appeared to drift aimlessly about the lounge with his eyes on the great glass doors as though he were waiting for someone, but his driftings had a purpose. Youth was sparring with youth. They had drawn away towards an empty settee in a shaded recess.

"What's the matter?"

"Kitty, if you dare to——"

The Chinaman had found a mirror in which he could watch the reflections of these two passionate young people. They were quarrelling. He saw the girl tap Ferrol's sleeve with a finger.

"Don't be such a fool!"

"I'm not a fool; but if you let that chap take you——"

"I suppose I can choose my own friends? I won't have you making a scene here. You might have the decency to remember——"

Ferrol bent towards her and said something that made her stiffen and sit still. His eyes were burning. He looked half devil, half saint.

"Kitty, I can't stand this any longer. I care too much; that's what's the matter. I know you have got a lot to bear, and other people to think of besides yourself, but I am sick of this rotten life, for you and for myself. We have got to fight this out."

Her hands fidgeted with her dress.

"It's hopeless," she said. "You haven't a brass farthing."

"I'd change that—somehow—if you would back me up."

She shrugged her shoulders and glanced nervously across the lounge.

"We can't talk here."

"Well, let me walk home with you."

"I don't allow it."

"Oh, come! Well, to-morrow—somewhere. What about St. James's Park, or, say, the Admiralty Arch? Cut your lessons after four. I'll cut mine."

She hesitated, and he touched her, gently, appealingly, as though she were made of the fine and sacred stuff his love wished her to be.

"Kitty, you don't know——"

"I'll come," she said.

She jumped up smiling, gave a shake of the head, and made towards the stairs, and Alan Ferrol followed her as though some new happiness had come to him.

The Chinaman stood quite still for a while in the middle of the lounge. Then he walked slowly and deliberately to the long desk where half a dozen men and girls were busy with ledgers and tickets. He addressed one of the men.

"I wish to have dancing lessons," he said.

The clerk glanced up, but showed no surprise.

"Certainly, sir. Our hours are from eleven till six."

"Can I select my instructress?"

"It can be arranged, sir. Can I book you a course of a dozen lessons?"

"They will begin to-morrow at three?"

"Certainly, sir. What name, sir?"

"Mr. Yen."

Mr. Yen brought out his pocket-book. His face retained the same moonlike tranquillity.

"The instructress wears a red dress. Her name is Miss Kitty. Excuse me, I have forgotten the rest. A friend recommended her to me."

"Miss Armitage. It can be arranged, sir."

"I thank you."

Mr. Yen ascended to the ballroom, and, finding a quiet corner behind one of the little round tables, he sat like a yellow Buddha watching this strange Western life. The great room was full of queer, post-war people, feverish, sensational, crudely material, and often very vulgar. Mr. Yen seemed to see everything and nothing—cheap souls in beautiful bodies, baby's eyes that glittered greedily, soft fabrics and soft bodies that were like cushions under which were hidden elusive youth. He was a philosopher, and yet he marvelled.

His eyes followed two figures, that confectionery creature with her red mouth and her brilliant pallor and her provoking, sensuous grace. She danced all the evening with her devotee, whose bemused and egregious bliss made Mr. Yen pity him.

"In these days," he thought, "our vampires suck gold instead of blood."

He looked with a very different expression at Alan Ferrol, this unhappy youth caught in the fatal net of the money-god, his manhood drowned in the shallows of a pair of baby's eyes. Strange that a soldier, a young man who had faced death and conquered it, should be so blind! To stand poor and humiliated at the gate of life while the porter at the gate salaamed to some fat huckster: "Pass, you with the full purse, hero and patron, beloved of young women. Stand back, you beggar soldier. You ought to know you are not wanted here."

Mr. Yen smiled.

"How like he is to his father," he thought. "It may be that a soul

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has come from the same heaven and entered the body of the son."

Mr. Yen waited till the end. Then he disappeared. He entered the big car that was waiting for him, and was driven by his Chinese chauffeur to his house in Orchard Square. He had taken the house furnished for six months, and this was the fifth month of his tenancy. Four months had passed before he had found that which he had come to seek.

At three o'clock next afternoon Mr. Yen attended for his dancing lesson. He did not know that his selection of Miss Armitage had caused a considerable squabble among the young women who served as instructresses, or that the gentlemen from the East were looked upon as prizes. A little French blonde had argued that it was her turn to be the friend of "a little yellow god." "Pepita had the last. Miss Armitage had the rajah—before that." But Kitty, secure in her claim that she had been specially recommended to Mr. Yen, waited for him, secured him, and took him in hand as though he were a small boy—the precious son of wealthy parents.

Mr. Yen, imperturbable and unfurried, was led about by this young thing who made it her business to be gay and kind and fascinating. Of course, the whole affair was quite preposterous, but Mr. Yen had come there to be preposterous. The motive was the only thing that mattered.

Between each dance they sat out and chatted.

"I am afraid I am verree-clumsee."

She flattered him.

"You leave it to me. I'll teach you in six lessons."

"But I am an old man."

"Nonsense. Nobody is old these days. How well you speak English."

She looked encouragingly into his bland and smiling face.

"Is this your first visit?"

"Yes. I know many English in China."

"And you come for a holiday?"

He nodded.

"I am an old man; I have much money; I spend it. I come to England to look for a wife for my adopted son."

"Couldn't you find one in China?"

"Not an English wife."

Miss Armitage laughed.

"Well, I'll be blessed! Is he Chinese—your adopted son?"

"No—English."

"And what does he say about it?"

"He is a wise boy—he leaves it to me. But he wishes her to be dark, and to dance."

Miss Armitage looked at him a little suspiciously. Was this little old yellow gentleman poking fun at her.

"You are a wicked tease," she said. "I don't believe you."

"My dear young lady, it is quite true."

There was more dancing—Mr. Yen performing like a stiff and rather stately doll. They had tea together, and watched the other pupils, men and women of all sizes and ages. Ferrol was not present.

Mr. Yen behaved to her with the most perfect and gentle courtesy. He answered her questions, suffered her curiosity, and allowed her to extract from him the facts that he was a banker, an owner of steamships, a merchant, a what not. When he took his departure she ran down to the lounge with him like an impulsive and unsophisticated child.

"You ought to come to-night. I'll dance with you."

"It is a very great honour," he said.

She waited and watched him get into his big closed car.

"He's a gold beetle—all right. He ought to drop some of the dust."

She remembered her appointment with Ferrol, and she changed her shoes and rushed off to it with a vague feeling of resentment. She liked Alan very well; had he been a gilded youth she would have liked him supremely. They met, about

By Warwick Deeping

five o'clock, at the Admiralty Arch. It was growing dusk. Mr. Yen was there, undreamed of and unnoticed.

So absorbed were they in this most ancient of problems that half London might have followed them and they would not have noticed it. They walked and walked, and Mr. Yen walked with them, but at a little distance. It grew dark, and these two youthful figures still drifted on like two birds sparring in the air. They talked incessantly and at the same time. It is probable that they hardly noticed whither they were going. Mr. Yen followed them into Whitehall, down Parliament Street, to Westminster Bridge. Here they turned to the left along the Embankment, and presently they came to a standstill, leaning against the wall and looking over the river. Mr. Yen slipped into a seat behind them, and, pulling his hat down over his face, pretended to be asleep.

He listened. The struggle between the spirit and the flesh reached its climax. The girl stood suffering the scorching sincerity of a young man's love. Ferrol forgot to be tactful, delicate, persuasive, for he had reached that degree of passionate fierceness when the truth melts and flows like liquid metal.

"Do you think I don't know what life is? It is because I love that I want you to give up this horrible sponging game. That's what it is. Don't you realize it? You must realize it."

She answered him with fierce swiftness.

"Yes—all very nice for you—I wasn't brought up in lavender. I had to begin fighting early. A lot of mercy a girl gets from men. I'm hard. I can play the game."

"Kitty," he said, "you don't know what love is. Do you think it does not humiliate me to see you trading on these fools and cads. Look here, marry me, and I swear——"

He had hurt her, and she struck like a cat.

"No, thanks, Mr. Propriety. I'm

fed up with the whole sentimental rot men talk. When I marry——"

"You'll marry some rich beast?"

"And why not? What about the French? You are always gassing about the French. Good-bye."

She broke away abruptly.

"Kitty——"

"Look here," she said, "you are just a silly kid, Alan. You had better keep away from our place. I don't want you sulking there."

"By God, I will keep away," he said. "You don't know what I have offered you."

The girl hailed a strolling taxi and disappeared, while the man remained by the wall, shoulders hunched up, eyes fixed upon the river.

Someone touched him on the shoulder. He started; he thought that Kitty had come back.

"Alan Ferrol."

He stared into the calm, moon-face of Mr. Yen.

"I beg your pardon!"

Mr. Yen removed his hat.

"The East comes to the West," he said, "but twenty years ago the West came to the East. You were only half as high as this wall when your father sent you home to England. Three years later he followed you, and I never saw him again. But I have seen his grave, his resting-place—and you."

Ferrol continued to stare at the face of Mr. Yen.

"What do you want?" he began.

Mr. Yen took a card from his pocket.

"That is where I live. Come and see me. Your father was my friend. I am yours."

He pushed the card into Ferrol's hand.

"Not the river, my son, not the dark river. The sun always rises in the East."

He left Ferrol standing under a street lamp, very much astonished, and staring at the card. His dignity and his social prejudices were a little ruffled and up in arms, for to be accosted by a Chinaman

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and warned against suicide did not seem flattering to a young man's pride. This Mr. Yen, whoever he was, had been watching him, shadowing him. Who the devil was Mr. Yen?

Ferrol was about to tear up the card and throw it away into the gutter when some faint memory restrained him.

"Yes—Yen! I seem to remember father using the name. But why all this mystery?"

Mr. Yen spent the evening at the Belgrave Rooms under the wing of Miss Kitty Armitage. He did not dance, and she—deserting her devotees—gave up the whole evening to amusing Mr. Yen. She was merry, irresponsible, yet managing. Ferrol's searching sincerity, the anguish of a young man's love, had left no mark upon her; she looked like a doll, smooth, sleek, baby-eyed. And Mr. Yen, insisting upon her dancing part of the evening, sat in his corner and considered her. She filled him with pity—this little bird of prey—in love with herself.

"Her soul is very young," he thought; "she is but beginning; she is a little animal—poor child; she has many lives to live before she learns. She does not suffer; she will be taught to suffer. Perhaps she was necessary to that boy; he needed the wound—the wisdom, but there it should end. Do I read the will of the Great Intelligence aright? Fate is being kind to you; I help and I am helped."

Mr. Yen had breakfasted. He sat near one of the windows of the house in Orchard Square, wrapped up in a flowered silk dressing-gown of silver, green and peacock blue. This morning his wise old face showed a few wrinkles, but it was serene, contemplative, quietly expectant. Presently he leant forward in his chair; he was watching something or someone in the square, a young man walking up and down under the branches of the plane trees.

"Pride," he said to himself. "How proud youth is."

It took young Ferrol half an hour to make up his mind on the matter of this visit to Mr. Yen. He crossed the road and rang the bell.

He was shown into this spacious London room with its Georgian furniture, and its windows looking out upon the trees. Mr. Yen had turned his chair so that his back was to the light. He wanted to watch the face of Gordon Ferrol's son.

"You asked me to call on you."

Mr. Yen made a slight movement of the head.

"Sit down. This is not the house of a stranger."

Ferrol was not at ease. He was the young man wearing the harness of a sensitive pride, ready to resent patronage. He wore his poverty with a defiant spread of the shoulders.

Mr. Yen smiled at him.

"You will think it strange that an old Chinaman should touch you on the shoulder and ask you to come and talk to him. Life is strange—directly we cease to be conventional. You will find cigarettes on that table."

Ferrol opened the silver box. He was like a restive horse, but Mr. Yen had hands of silk.

"You wonder, perhaps, why I am here, why you are here. Nothing happens by chance, my son; only the blind blunder against the thing they call chance. I will tell you a story."

He folded his hands, and sat with his eyes half closed.

"Twenty years ago an Englishman and a Chinaman lived in a Chinese city. They were friends. And it happened that the Chinaman was afflicted by some sorrow or some unwisdom out of his own past. He suffered; he was brought low—he drank the cup of his affliction and accepted it. Then this Englishman stretched out a hand and raised him up. The Chinaman, chastened and hopeful, began to prosper. He prospered exceedingly, grew rich in the world's goods. The Englishman went home to his own country to

join his wife and child. The Englishman was your father."

Ferrol was sitting straight in his chair.

"Both my father and mother are dead."

Mr. Yen bent his head and made a movement with his hands.

"I have seen the place where the bodies lie at rest. Your father was a good man, my son, and he died poor. He had the riches that are stored within. I too was rich, and I too had a religion. It is possible that you have not studied the wisdom of the East, and I will speak to you of my faith, my path. We live not once, but many times, retreading the same path, but ever climbing upwards, little by little. The good that we do, the beauty that we win, are like precious stones—threaded one by one upon the silken thread of our reincarnations. But—we are ever in debt, and all debts must be discharged, for every debt that clings to us means a longer treading of the path—more rebirths into casual bodies."

Ferrol stammered.

"You mean to say, sir——?"

The "sir" slipped out by a gracious and natural impulse.

"My son, I grew old; I bethought me of this debt. The great war was over; I took ship, and came to England; I made search for you, and I found you. I cannot pay the debt to your father—but I can pay it to you."

Ferrol's face hardened.

"Do you mean you owed him money? He died poor."

Mr. Yen's eyes gave a momentary glitter.

"No; the money was paid long ago. The debt was a debt of the soul. My son, it is possible that you will let me pay this debt!"

Ferrol got up and walked to the window. He stood there a moment, frowning, troubled.

"I suppose you know that I'm a broken man?" he said.

He turned to Mr. Yen, who nodded.

"I too was broken; your father mended me."

Ferrol sat down again, facing the fire, and Mr. Yen watched him. There was a long silence between them, one of those strange silences during which many unseen things happen. Ferrol began to talk to him of everything, the war, his wounds, his disillusionment, his poverty, his humiliations.

Mr. Yen sat and dreamed.

"My son," he said presently, "in a month I go back to the East. There is a place for you there, work, honour, meditation. I am old, and I am lonely."

Ferrol looked at him for a moment and turned again to the fire.

"There is someone else," he said, "whom I should like to save."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

Mr. Yen spread his hands.

"Is she of brass or of gold? Is she ripe to be saved? It may be that she has many lives to live."

Ferrol paused before answering.

"Who knows? She is grist to the world's mill. I should like her to have her chance."

Mr. Yen sat very still. He seemed to reflect—and presently he began to speak, and with such gentleness and wisdom that even this young man's love could not be hurt.

"The soul of her must be proved," was what he said, "and I, your father's friend, will prove it. My son, you must trust me."

"You are right," said Gordon Ferrol's son; "I will trust you."

During the next three days the little yellow Buddha was seen regularly at the Belgrave Rooms, shining benignly upon the child of the West, and on the evening of the third day he threw open the gate of the garden wherein souls are proved. This girl should walk in the garden and choose the white flower or the red.

Mr. Yen left early. They had had supper together, and his car was waiting. He offered to drive Kitty Armitage to her home.

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She gave him a challenging look.
"Well—perhaps."

She went with him down the red-carpeted steps, through the brightness of the lounge, and out into the lesser brightness of the street. The door of the car was opened for her; she spread herself in the rich spaciousness and looked happy. She noticed the silver holders full of flowers, and smelt some Eastern perfume that scented the rugs and cushions. She was conscious of a sense of gliding opulence, a processional splendour; her crude, childish soul exulted; her hands lay in her lap with the fingers curved like claws.

"Say, it's some car!"

Mr. Yen sat like a dreaming image. He felt the sparkle and glow of her young savagery.

"Say, tell him to drive around; Leicester Square—you know, and Piccadilly and Park Lane. It's my swank machine to-night."

Mr. Yen reached for the speaking-tube and gave the driver his orders. They processed, they glittered; she sat like a vain child hugging her self-love.

"Suppose you are very rich," she said.

Mr. Yen nodded.

"Riches are as dust, my child."

She laughed.

"I can do with some of the dust. When I have had my fling—of course—"

They came to those purlieus off the Edgware Road where Kitty lived with her mother and sisters. She did not think it necessary for Mr. Yen to see her home or the street in which she lived.

"You can put me down here. I haven't far to go."

Mr. Yen understood. He spoke through the speaking-tube, and the car drew up at the kerb. Mr. Yen opened the door for her, and she slipped out.

"Good night; see you to-morrow, eh?"

"Wait," he said; "you have forgotten your fur coat."

He lifted something from the seat and held it out to her, a magnificent coat of sables. She had been sitting on it, and had thought it a rug.

Their eyes met. The girl's were hard and steady. She laughed.

"Why, so I have! I say—you are a——"

She had taken the coat, and Mr. Yen's face remained utterly without expression. He gave her a queer, enigmatic little bow, pulled the door to, and sat back in his corner. While the driver was turning the car he had a glimpse of Kitty standing under a street lamp and examining the coat.

"Poor child," he thought, "and yet——! She must learn, but she shall not learn at the expense of Gordon Ferrol's son."

Alan Ferrol came to him next morning, and Mr. Yen—sitting by the window and looking out at the yellow plane trees—spoke these words:

"Go to that place to-night. Watch for her to enter. You shall judge."

Ferrol went. He placed himself in a corner of the lounge and watched big Pakenham in his livery of blue and gold open and close the great glass doors. It was a cold night. People flowed in, and presently she came, this Western child with the little sightless soul. She was flushed—triumphant; her face, with its red mouth, and coils of blue-black hair seemed to float in the collar of her sable coat. She exulted. The sleek, barbaric swagger of her challenged the eyes of her barbaric world.

Ferrol got up and went out.

Half an hour later he was standing before Mr. Yen's fire—seeing pictures among the flames.

"I have lost my last illusion," he said.

Mr. Yen touched him again upon the shoulder.

"My son, when illusions die life begins. Your mate will come to you some day. Never doubt it."

WARWICK DEERING.

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PROCESSED

The Other Man's Burden

By WARWICK DEEPING

HADFIELD received two telegrams on that June day. The first was from his partner, Peter Lambourne, and it seemed of such little importance that Hadfield crumpled up the paper and dropped it into the waste-paper basket beside his desk.

Sorry. Feeling a bit seedy. Not coming to town to-day.

The second telegram reached Hadfield about half-past four in the afternoon, and it had been sent by Lambourne's wife.

Please come at once. Peter has had an accident.—Rose.

Sandys, the office commissionaire, was standing in the open doorway, waiting to be told whether the telegram needed an answer, and he saw nothing portentously dramatic in the figure seated at the desk. James Hadfield, the junior partner, was one of those quiet men who live their lives unostentatiously, and who end by becoming gardeners or collectors of china or old books. He was rather shy. He had little humorous wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. People said of the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield, solicitors, "Oh, yes, Hadfield's a thorough chap, steady and all that, but Lambourne is the firm; Lambourne has the brains."

"Sandys," said the man at the desk, in that leisurely voice of his.

"Sir?"

"Look me out the next two trains to Marley. Order me a taxi, and tell Mr. Sotherby I want him."

Sandys withdrew, and Sotherby—the firm's confidential clerk—took Sandys's place.

"Mr. Sotherby, I am going at once to Marley. Mr. Lambourne has had an accident."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"The message does not say. I shall have to break two appointments. Will you please see the people and explain."

"Certainly, sir. Shall I try to arrange the appointments for to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you will. I shall be here at nine to-morrow."

So James Hadfield drove off in his taxi to Paddington and caught a train for Marley, where Lambourne had a cottage on the river. He settled down in the corner of his first-class compartment and watched the June country sweep by as they travelled towards the sunset, nor was he conscious of any urgent feeling of suspense. Lambourne was a man who always made the most of a scratch or a sore throat, and it is doubtful whether Hadfield would have responded so swiftly to the appeal had it not carried the signature of Lambourne's wife.

He saw haymakers at work late, loading and carrying the hay, and the imagined fragrance of the sun-dried grass provoked memories that were both pleasant and sad. The yellow sunlight, the shorn fields, the wagons spilling over with their grey-green loads, created for him a sudden atmosphere in which Rosamund Lambourne seemed to move. He had always admired his partner's wife. Years ago, before Lambourne had met her, Hadfield had seen her in the hayfields with the sunlight in her hair.

"I wonder how she has liked it," he thought, "at the bottom of her heart?"

Had she found happiness with Lambourne—Lambourne, who was ambitious, brilliant, witty, and full of the restlessness of the climber? She was a woman who put on an air of happiness as she put on her frocks—charmingly and with fastidious care; but Hadfield had never been able to convince himself that her happiness was as satisfying as her frocks.

"Exactng fellow, Peter. Always wanting flattery. Curious how some men must have their cup of flattery before they can stand up and speak!"

The train pulled up at Marley and Hadfield got out. The station seemed asleep; it convinced you that nothing exciting ever happened here. A porter yawned as he collected the few tickets.

And Marley was like its station, red and sun-steeped and slothful, lying lazily in the green hollow of its trees. Hadfield took the familiar turning by the church-yard wall, where the yews were black and the old elder trees dropped a heavy perfume when in flower. Everything seemed supremely peaceful.

"I suppose Lambourne has twisted that knee of his punting," he thought, "or cut himself shaving!"

His mood was faintly ironical. He had no fore-feeling of any tragedy, or that he was walking towards a catastrophic uprooting of his own quiet habits, an overturning of his own philosophy of life. He remembered afterwards how he paused to smell a rose that hung over a garden fence.

He came to the lane that led to Lambourne's week-end cottage. He saw the flicker of the aspens, and heard the river rushing over the weir; the high woods were full of arrows of gold.

In the lane he met a man, a rather worried-looking man, and obviously the doctor. His eyes gave a gleam of relief. He stopped.

"Excuse me, is it Mr. Hadfield?"

"Yes."

"I am very glad you have come. Mr. Lambourne has had an accident. He is dying."

Hadfield was aware of a queer, tense feeling in the muscles of his back.

"Dying! What do you mean?"

"He shot himself, accidentally it seems. Cleaning a revolver. The old story."

"Good God!"

"He has been asking for you, worrying for you to come. He is conscious."

They looked at each other. Then Hadfield made a movement towards the cottage.

"I'm glad I came," he said. "You will be here again soon?"

"Yes; but it is quite hopeless. Chest, you know; internal bleeding; it is only a question of time."

Hadfield walked on. He opened the gate as though there was no gate there, and moved up the familiar path between its red and white standard roses. He found himself standing in the little lounge hall, talking to Rosamund Lambourne. She was calm, disastrously calm, with that frozen horror giving her a tense self-mastery. Her eyes had a blind look, and her face made Hadfield think of one of those white roses.

"I am glad that you have come," she said.

She pointed to the door of the dining-room.

"He is there; he has been asking for you. We dared not move him upstairs!"

Her voice ran strangely level.

"They say that he is dying. I cannot believe it. I suppose one never can realize death when it comes."

Hadfield stood tongue-tied, looking at the door behind which Peter Lambourne lay dying. He was not an eloquent man, and there were many things which he wished to say, but he was unable to say them. Moreover, he was rendered even more inarticulate by her tragic composure. It made him think of a fine shell of brittle glass which might break and fall to pieces under the touch of even the gentlest hand.

"Yes, it is like that," he said. "I can't tell you how—"

He caught himself up, for her eyes said, "Please—please do not speak to me—now."

She made a movement towards the door, but he was quick to forestall her, sensing her fear of that door.

"All right. I'll go in. Your pluck is wonderful, Rose. I always knew it."

He opened the door, entered the room, and closed the door behind him. The room was half darkened and seemed to smell of pungent drugs. He saw Lambourne lying on the sofa, propped up on pillows, and his face was the face of some ivory figure. He was breathing rapidly, with quick, shallow breaths; his face expressed infinite and agonized distress.

"Jim! Thank God!"

He spoke in a whisper, and made a feeble beckoning movement with one hand; but though his voice was weak, every syllable was distinct.

"Quick! Come here. I want to get it over. She—she must not know."

Hadfield sat down beside the sofa. He became aware suddenly of a sense of impending tragedy, a tragedy which involved him in its anguish.

"How did it happen?"

Lambourne laid a cold hand on his wrist.

"Hadfield," he said, "it was not an accident. I shot myself, but I bungled it. Cowardice! I wanted to go out like a coward, and even now I am a coward. No, don't speak. Listen. I'm going quickly. I have got to tell you a terrible thing."

The Other Man's Burden

Hadfield nodded. He felt strangely chilled.

"Man, I have been gambling, and I have lost. It has been going on for months—but the money was not mine."

"Not yours?"

"No; it was clients' money, trust money. I pledged clients' securities. I was sure—so sure—that the thing would come off, but I had the damnedest luck."

Hadfield sat rigid. He felt anger within him, incredulous, scornful anger; but it was anger that could not be expressed. He realized it as he sat there beside this whimpering, dying friend; he felt that some almost unbearable burden had been laid upon his shoulders, and that it was his fate to bear it.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me everything."

He sat and listened to the disastrous, breathless tale of an ambitious man's adventures. He was shocked, amazed by the disloyalty of the thing, the crass selfishness of it. He saw all that Lambourne's confession implied—ruin to innocent people, shame, bankruptcy, prosecution for fraud. But while he listened he found that he was not thinking of Lambourne, nor even of himself, but of the woman somewhere in the house, that woman who had enough to bear, and who did not know.

"Is that all?" he asked at last.

Lambourne lay back and looked at him. There was fear in his eyes, fear of this other man's grim gentleness.

"Yes, all. But why don't you curse me, Jim?"

He saw Hadfield smile, a strange, inward smile.

"Would that help? So you have lost all the Vincit trust money, old Barter's securities, some thirty thousand pounds?"

The dying man winced and said nothing for a moment.

"You will never forgive me, Jim. I don't ask to be forgiven; but if only—"

Their eyes met. Hadfield saw the anguish of an appeal in the other man's eyes.

"If it can be hushed up."

"Yes, if!"

He rose and went and stood by the window. He felt bewildered, distraught, as though all the familiar landmarks of life had suddenly crumbled away and disappeared. He was conscious of a ghastly sense of insecurity, of things slipping away from under him, yet this very

feeling of insecurity made the soul of him reach out and grasp at something solid. He thought of the office he had left less than two hours ago, with its rows of black deed boxes, its atmosphere of respectable solidity, its staff of clerks, old Sotherby's grey head bent over his files and ledgers. Was all that to go? He thought of his bachelor flat in Kensington, his books, his quiet life with its ideals, his own very sensitive pride. Yet there was no great spasm of emotion rising from these thoughts, and he needed emotion.

"I must fight," he thought.

And for what?

The answer came to him swiftly. He turned about with a suggestion of fierceness and returned to the sofa.

"You say that she does not know?"

"Rose knows nothing."

"You swear that?"

A spasm of emotion passed over Lambourne's face.

"Man, if only she could be kept from knowing! Her own money is safe, about ten thousand pounds; I never touched it. But if she could be spared—"

Hadfield sat down beside the sofa.

"The shame—exactly. But are you thinking of her? No, not altogether."

He gripped Lambourne's wrist.

"Your vanity—what? You want her to go on believing in you; you want to pass out of the picture with a little romantic strut. What damned vain things we are, Lambourne! We cry out that we wish to spare others, but we are thinking of ourselves."

Lambourne made an abject yet appealing gesture with his left hand.

"Don't, man, don't! I'm stripped naked. Isn't it bad enough to find oneself out, and to have to die with the knowledge of it? Can't I have one illusion left me—her illusion. Can't I have that?"

He looked up into Hadfield's face, and Hadfield rose and went again to the window. He saw the garden sloping to the river, the greenness, the sheen of the water, the dying sunlight on the quiet trees. Peace, beauty, tranquillity. Yes, it was here. An hour ago his own soul had been full of it, but now— He was conscious of an overwhelming melancholy, and interpenetrating it a strange tenderness. He was not thinking of Lambourne—he was thinking of Lambourne's wife.

He turned again to the dying man.

"It might be done," he said.

And then he smiled.

"You will go, Peter, but someone must live to keep up the illusion. I am that person. I have got to live and try to pay back thirty thousand pounds."

Lambourne rose suddenly to a half-sitting posture on the sofa. His white face seemed to strain forward into the half darkness of the room.

"Jim, you—you'll do it—try to do it?"

"Yes."

"And not let her know?"

"And not let her know."

"Good—God bless you!"

He tried to hold out a hand, but it was the end with him, and Hadfield caught him by the shoulders as he fell back upon the pillows. A sudden great pity stirred in the younger man.

"All right, Peter—all right, old man."

"Fetch—fetch her. I'm going."

Hadfield gave one last glance at him and walked quickly towards the door.

The lounge hall was empty and he crossed it to the drawing-room, calling softly but clearly, "Mrs. Lambourne—Rose!"

She did not answer him, and he found the drawing-room empty; but as he turned back into the hall he saw her come suddenly in from the garden by way of the loggia and the garden door.

"Rose! It is very near. He wants you."

She came towards him quite suddenly, but as she passed him in the dusk of the hall she gave Hadfield one quick yet lingering look, but she did not utter a word. He had a strange feeling that he had seen the ghost of her, and not the living woman. She had looked at him fixedly, with an expression of bewilderment and wonder, and he did not suspect that he had inspired that look, and that her very obvious emotion was a new light burning beside the old. He saw her as a woman moving half blindly in the fog of a great grief. She was bewildered by the suddenness of it, and her bewilderment was natural.

She opened the door and entered, while Hadfield stood motionless in the middle of the hall, watching the closed door and thinking his own thoughts.

"I am glad I promised him that."

He felt himself deeply moved, carried away and above himself by the flood of that generous impulse, not regretting it now that those suffering eyes of hers had set a seal upon his promise.

"She shall never know," he said.

His throat felt dry and thick. He wanted to be alone, out there somewhere where the green world and the water met, and to sit in silence, feeling the twilight fall like the fulfilment of a dream. Everything was changed; but the green world, the river, and the sunset were the same. He went out and down through the garden, where the roses and the clove pinks mingled their perfumes. He was both exultant and sad, yet into his sadness crept a little glimmer of ironical laughter, like the occasional mocking note in the song of a bird. "Why did you do it? For her—for her! Fool, fool!" He found the punt lying by the bank, and he stepped into it, and sat down on the cushions. His eyes had a far-away look; they were years younger, dreamy, the eyes of a very young man, and as he sat there he smiled. His vision of the future was vivid and complete, and mocking in its completeness, and yet he smiled.

"Like some old sentimental tale," he thought.

But another voice in him cried "No," and cried it with such fierceness that he ceased to smile and sat grim and rigid.

Silence—and thirty thousand pounds! What did it mean? He understood, he foresaw the long, secret struggle, the solitude, the suspense, the sordid worries, the celibate and lonely future, the silence that would shut out sympathy. He would have to bear it alone. He could tell no one, not even her. He would never be able to tell her, and that spelt renunciation.

"Oh, man," he thought, "what a chain you have laid upon me. In saving her illusion of you—I lose her."

And then he faced the fact that he might fail, and the more he considered it the more probable the failure seemed. He would be living and working in a rotten building, a building that would exist on sufferance, and which any sudden mischance might push down—the fussiness of a mistrustful client, a death, a whim. Everything depended upon confidence. He would have to pay the interest on that misappropriated money while he was making every effort to re-accumulate the capital. He would have to put all his own savings into the concern, and they were but a tithe of what he needed.

"Yes, it looks pretty black," he thought. "Even if I succeed, I shall have to live the life of a galley slave. But am I going to be scared by that?"

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He was scared by it, but he reacted against his own fear.

"Well, I never thought that I should be the man to lead such a forlorn hope! How little we can foresee what life has in store for us."

Suddenly he became conscious of the twilight and of the darkening face of the river; the aspens shivered, the trees were turning black, the grass growing grey. He looked up towards the garden, for he fancied that he had heard a sound of movement, perhaps no more than the fluttering of roosting birds in the foliage. And then he saw her. She came down the grass path to the water's edge, her white dress more white in the twilight. She stood there, looking down at him.

"It is all over," she said.

Her eyes were two circles of blackness. She seemed calm yet awed, and he remembered wondering why she did not weep. He had heard of that dry and stark grief which cannot ease itself with tears, and perhaps this grief was hers.

"What poor things words are," he said.

She made a movement towards the punt, and he gathered that she wished to join him, and he was conscious of a deep thrill of wonder and exultation. That she should need him, be drawn to him at such a moment in her life! He stood up and helped her into the punt, and leaving her the cushions, went to the other end and sat down upon the raised planking. He was still in his city clothes, incongruous clothes in such a place, but they would be his slave's dress and were symbolical.

"I cannot understand how it happened," she said.

Hadfield did not look at her. He stared at the water.

"Just tragic carelessness. We are all of us tragically careless at times."

She said nothing for a while, and if her silence was suggestive it did not suggest to Hadfield that she was more alive to the liveness of the live man than to the silence of the dead one. It simply never occurred to him that she might suspect; he would have been amazed had he realized that she knew.

"I suppose it was an accident?"

"Of course it was an accident. Peter had no reason——"

"No reason—at all?"

"None."

"No business worries?"

"None."

He lied calmly and with a gentle cheerfulness, looking down the length of the punt towards her as though they were discussing some immaterial thing. She avoided his eyes. Her pose was pensive, meditative, as she sat there dipping her hands in the water, and he remained silent, thinking that silence was what she needed, the silence of a man's sympathy. The darkness gathered about them; the reflections began to die out of the water, and it became black and obscure.

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his face.

"Everything will be on your shoulders now."

He managed to smile.

"My burden is small compared to yours."

"Is it?" she said vaguely. "Is it?"

She made a little restless movement, and the punt swayed slightly.

"Can you stay here to-night? I should like you to stay here to-night."

"Of course," he said.

"And you have had no dinner! I must see to that."

"Oh, I can go down to the inn."

"No," she said. "No, I cannot permit that. I like to feel you here."

He leant towards her, and his voice betrayed his emotion.

"Rose, you are not to worry about anything. Leave everything to me. This is the time when a friend can be of use, and I want to be of use. I'm afraid life is going to be rather horrible for you for the next few days."

She looked at him in the darkness.

"There will have to be an inquest?"

"I am afraid there is no help for it; but I shall be there with you, and I can prove that Peter had no worries—that the thing was a pure accident."

She bent her head and was silent for fully half-a-minute.

"You are a very good man, Jim," she said presently. "I am glad that you are my friend."

¶

AS James Hadfield entered the doorway of Number Five, Gresham Place he realized that he was entering a prison house, a place of bondage.

He had slept hardly at all, and his parting with Rosamund Lambourne had been hurried and a little self-conscious. He was seeing life and its possibilities with the cold eyes of the morning; the world of reality

looked grey, and a wind was ruffling the river and troubling the foliage of the trees.

"Come back to-night," she had said to him. "I feel that I want you here."

He had promised to go back, and the thought that she needed him gave him new courage. For he needed courage, courage of a high order, the courage which suffers yet will not surrender. He was alone, utterly alone, and he was made to realize it that very day.

Immediately he opened the outer door of the office he realized that the office knew, not of Lambourne's defalcations, but of his death. He was conscious of a moment of tenseness; he seemed to be making his entry upon a stage to play a part which was difficult and strange.

Sandys, the commissionaire, raised his bald head from the morning paper and stood up.

"Good morning, sir. Very bad news, sir, this."

"It is, Sandys, very."

So it was out already! Was not a man to be allowed a moment of quiet breathing before the newsmongers hustled after him, ready to make money out of suffering and tears? He met old Sotherby in the passage—old Sotherby, whose long and carefully betrousered legs looked like two deal boards. He always reminded Hadfield of a stork, and this morning he appeared to be a very melancholy stork.

"Is it true, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Quite true, unfortunately."

"Dear, dear; it is a blow to the firm."

Hadfield set his teeth. He had a moment's anger, an anger that was followed by a desire for bitter laughter. A blow to the firm! By God, it was that, but not the blow old Sotherby and the rest of them believed it to be. He was struck by the irony of the situation—the man who had seemed so brilliant lying dead, while the illusion of his brilliance lived, and he, the plain man, had to carry the dead illusion on his back.

"There is someone waiting to see you, sir."

"Who is it?"

"A pressman, I think."

Hadfield's blue eyes filled with a momentary glare of anger.

"As if one had not enough to do!" he said, and went in to tackle the newsmonger.

He told his first lie, and told it glibly

and with a touch of scorn, to an alert young man in spectacles.

"Yes, a most unfortunate and tragic accident."

"I suppose it was an accident, Mr. Hadfield?"

Hadfield gave him a quick stare.

"I beg your pardon."

The young man's trade lived on self-assurance, but he wilted a little under that stare.

"I—mean—it is so necessary to prevent misleading information getting about."

"Quite so," said Hadfield. "Mr. Lambourne was cleaning an old service revolver, and what has happened so often to other men happened to him. He hadn't a care in the world. That's all. I must ask you to excuse me. I am very busy."

He got rid of the pressman, rang for Sandys, and gave him very definite orders as to admitting any more of that ilk; yet hardly had he disposed of one infliction than he was harassed by another. It was necessary for him to go through Lambourne's private papers. He had brought the dead man's keys with him, and leaving his own private room, he took his place in that of his dead partner. It was the post of honour and of danger, and yet a far more comfortable and sumptuous room than the one he had left, for Lambourne had always loved comfort and the luxury of beautiful things, and this room betrayed it. Hadfield, sitting in Lambourne's Sheraton arm-chair behind his exquisite bureau, looked round the room and saw in its rich details—the carpet, the prints upon the walls, the china on the mantelpiece—evidences of Lambourne's attitude towards life. It had always been something of a pose, studied, cleverly impressive.

In one corner stood Lambourne's private safe, screened by a casing that he had made up out of old oak panelling.

"My dear chap, why look at ugly things?"

How well he remembered the dead man's assumption of a sensitive fastidiousness. Ugly things! Yes, and Lambourne had studied the ugliness of exteriors, of surfaces that showed, and to Hadfield it was the inside of the safe which seemed ugly. It was his business to open it and lay bare its inward ugliness, uncover his dead partner's lapses, and then reclose its heavy door upon an illusion.

He was standing by the safe and selecting

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a key on Lambourne's key-ring, when he heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said, feeling vaguely impatient.

Old Sotherby entered. It seemed to Hadfield that he looked greyer than usual, drier, more precise. Moreover, he was uncomfortable, obviously uncomfortable, and at great pains to appear natural and at ease.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hadfield, may I have a few words with you on a personal matter?"

"Certainly, Mr. Sotherby. Sit down."

But Sotherby did not sit down. He remained standing very stiff and straight, his arms pressed against his body like two wings.

"It may seem a rather inopportune moment, sir, for me to choose, but Mr. Lambourne's death has been a great shock to me. As a matter of fact, I had been contemplating retiring."

A slight frown showed on Hadfield's forehead.

"You wish to leave us?" he said.

"It is with regret, sir, but the shock of this affair——"

"You want to go at once?"

"It has quite unnerved me."

They looked at each other, and old Sotherby's eyes seemed to narrow and his face to grow corpse-like and inscrutable. To Hadfield it expressed fear, a cunning and careful cautiousness, and he was shocked by it, and by the unpleasant thoughts it provoked. Did the man know anything? Did he suspect anything? Or was it instinct, a vague feeling that something was wrong, something in which he did not wish to be involved?

"Just as you please, Mr. Sotherby," he said. "As you say your choice is a little inopportune."

"It is, Mr. Hadfield. I admit it; but I assure you that I feel quite incapable of giving proper attention. I am not so young, sir, as I was."

He moistened his thin lips with the point of his tongue.

"I was very attached to Mr. Lambourne."

Hadfield controlled his desire to blurt out something ironical and bitter.

"Very good, Mr. Sotherby. When you please. I shall be here to carry on!"

When the door had closed on Sotherby, Hadfield sat down again in Lambourne's chair and threw the keys on the desk. He

had not the heart for the moment to open that safe; he felt immensely discouraged, embittered, and conscious of his loneliness as a man is conscious of physical pain. He saw himself involved in a life of subterfuges and of lies, in a world of pretence, bluffing, gambling, doing all the things that the soul of him hated. There was no one in whom he could confide, no one to whom he could go for sympathy, and that was the most damnable part of all.

"Why should I do it?" he thought. "Why the devil should I do it? Better a smash or an exposure than years of sordid, sneaking drudgery—for what?"

He left the chair and moved restlessly about the room, tempted as he had never before been tempted, and the devil had him alone.

"Think what it means! Seven years' savings swallowed up; you will be poor as a rat; you will have to slave here day in, day out, for you will never be able to take a partner until the mess is cleared. And at any moment you may be found out. Someone may want to withdraw their securities. And you are making yourself an accomplice. If you fail, as it is more than likely you will fail, you will be disgraced, you will go to prison. Is it worth it, just to save a vain fool's reputation?"

That is what his worldly wisdom said to him, and for a minute or more he listened, until his glance fell upon a photograph which stood on Lambourne's mantelpiece—a photograph of Lambourne's wife. For the sake of a woman men have done many fine and many dastardly things, but in looking at Rosamund Lambourne's picture Hadfield knew that life utters sayings which are beyond the ken of worldly wisdom. A man may be madly generous and be right; he may be carefully wise and be proved a selfish fool.

He took the photograph into his hands. He was not a sentimental man. His feelings ran very deep, and did not often reach the surface.

"I have got to go through with it," he said, looking at her face, "for your sake, and for the sake of all that you stand for."

He smiled. He could not help thinking how easy this difficult life would be if he had her for a comrade and could go to her for sympathy. What a fool Lambourne had been not to take her more deeply into his life.

"Yes, but he was too shallow," he thought, "that was the whole trouble."

He replaced the portrait on the mantel-piece, telling himself that it should remain there, ever present to be gazed at and to help him in bad hours. She had given him his inspiration, and the inspiration enlarged itself like a landscape emerging from a fog. Sitting in Lambourne's chair, with the door locked between him and the outer world, and the telephone receiver removed from its bracket, he saw things in a richer and a more significant light than he had seen them an hour ago. He remembered the innocent people whom Lambourne's restless ambition had ruined.

"If I tell lies," he thought, "if I play a part in order to make their losses good, am I not justified? It is the motive which matters. These people will gain nothing by my telling the truth; they may regain everything if I can carry this gamble through. Does not the greater courage keep silent and strive in silence to make good what has been lost? Even if I fail they cannot suffer more bitterly."

He turned in his chair and glanced again at the woman's face.

"I'll do it," he said, "if it kills me."

And so he set quietly to work. He explored the secrets of that safe and faced facts which now failed to frighten him. He even found an adventurous and reckless sting in them. "If she knew," he thought. He interviewed clients, worked calmly through a mass of business, and pushed the idle, gossiping office back to work. He felt calm, strangely calm, raised above himself.

"I shall see her to-night," he kept thinking. "She must be saved all pain."

At eight o'clock he was at Marley.

He found her in the garden, sitting under the weeping ash at the far end of the lawn. He noticed that she glanced up quickly when he appeared, and that her eyes watched him all the way across the lawn. The hollow shell of the tree seemed to throw a soft green gloom about her, and from the midst of it her eyes seemed to ask some question.

"How good of you to come back," she said.

Already she was in black, and he thought that no colour had ever suited her so well.

"I wanted to come," he answered.

"You must be tired. Such a day tells on one."

Again he was aware of something questioning in her eyes, a mysterious curiosity.

"Oh, I am fairly tough," he said gently.

"Don't worry about me."

He took a chair beside her, and she produced some letters.

"Dr. Brandreth has been extraordinarily kind. He has done all sorts of things for me. I gave him your name, and he left this for you."

She handed him a letter, and he opened it, read it, and then put it away in his pocket.

"It is about the—the inquest."

She nodded.

"Brandreth has seen the coroner, and they had fixed the inquest for to-morrow evening at the Marley Arms."

"You will come?" she asked.

"Of course. I shall give evidence. I can assure the jury that Peter had no worries."

"I am glad you can do that," she said softly; but he was looking towards the river, and he did not see in her eyes the things that she left unsaid.

Nor did Hadfield know that in one short day he had become another man to her, a man of strange surprises, of fascinating silences and self-restraints. She had discovered in him the fineness, the quiet yet quixotic generosity which many a woman dreams of and never finds. Her marriage had disillusioned her; she had ceased to believe in certain of her ideals, and she had touched the edge of a period of cynicism. And now suddenly this tragic thing had happened and shown her, in a man who had seemed ordinary and familiar, a courage and strength that re-inspired dreams that had seemed dead.

"I can hardly believe it," she thought; "and yet I heard—I know."

And so, on a June evening, in that long, bare room in the Marley Arms, these two people watched each other with secret wonder and delight. Farmers, shopmen, plain men sat together on the Windsor chairs on one side of the coroner's table. The evening sunlight flooded into the room. Other figures were grouped opposite the men of the jury. A police constable stood at the door. Once he disappeared to drive away a group of shouting children.

Hadfield heard Rosamund Lambourne give her evidence, and in watching her he was more than ever the silent lover of her calmness and her dignity. He asked for repose in a woman, dignity, and a delicate sense of humour, and as she stood there in that long room he knew that she was suffering, but that her pride hid it like a mask. She did not parade her emotion as

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common women parade it, feeling that for once in their dull lives they hold the centre of the stage and must make the most of it. She despised the crowd as much as he did, and the crowd thought her cold.

In due course he took her place in front of the coroner's table, and she sat by the window, watching and listening. She saw his face in profile. He stood very straight, yet without any stiffness, his hands resting on the back of a chair. He, too, had dignity, the easy dignity of the man of the world. He gave his evidence very calmly, with a frank and almost friendly simplicity that put him in sympathy with the twelve plain men on the Windsor chairs. He was convincing.

"Your partner had no financial worries?"

"Absolutely none. He was a very successful man."

"You know of no reason why he should have taken his own life?"

"There was no reason. It was an accident."

Lambourne's wife sat there and marvelled at his calmness, at the quiet way in which he had taken an almost unbearable burden upon his shoulders and yet hid the burden from the world. To her this seemed the very highest form of courage, for it was secret and unsensational and it asked for no reward, and she saw in it a blunt challenge to the materialism of the modern world. To ask for no reward was to confess oneself a failure, to stand in the gutter while the noisy great went by.

"I never knew him until now," she thought.

In an hour the whole melancholy business was at an end. Lambourne's death had been a tragic accident. The jury recorded the obvious verdict and went back to their farms and their shops. Hadfield returned to the cottage with Rosamund Lambourne. He was silent, nor was she in a mood to talk, yet his very silence gave him the impression of a quiet exultation, of some brave act well and silently done.

"I have a room at the inn," he said, pausing at the gate. "You will let me arrange everything?"

"You are carrying so much—already."

"No," he said, and smiled.

She opened the gate and stood a moment facing him.

"I should like him to be here in Marley, and when it is over I want to go back to the little flat in town. Will you take me back?"

"Of course," he said.

She turned away, but faced him again.

"Will you arrange to sell this place and everything—everything in it? Yes, I wish it. Good night. You have been so good to me. I shall not forget."

Three days later they were standing together on the platform of Marley station. The funeral had been a very quiet one. The few relatives who had come to it had gone, and James Hadfield was taking Rose Lambourne away from Marley. Her maid was in charge of the luggage, and Hadfield and his dead partner's wife had walked to the far end of the platform, where there was a little garden, and whence it was possible to see the hanging beech woods above the river. They stood side by side in silence, the man as though he were on guard beside her, she looking towards the woods with eyes which said farewell.

"I shall never come here again," she said suddenly.

"No?"

"There are some memories which it is impossible to forget. What a patchwork life is!"

He nodded. He did not know whether her memories were bitter-sweet or unlovely; he did not ask her, and she did not tell him. Reticence is sacred and precious to people who are proud.

The train was signalled, and presently they heard the sound of it along the hollow of the green valley.

"I have reserved a carriage," he said.

She gave him a quick glance.

"You think of everything."

When they were locked in their reserved compartment and the train had left Marley under the edge of the sunset, Hadfield offered her one of the papers which he had bought, and taking up a magazine, prepared to efface himself. He thought that she would be glad of his silence and of his effacement, and that her mood was one of meditation. She accepted the paper, but she did not read it. He noticed that she looked out of the window and left the paper lying on her knees. He made a great pretence of being absorbed in his magazine, knowing that sensitive sorrow hates being watched.

Twenty minutes passed, and suddenly she spoke to him.

"I shall take another flat, a smaller one. Of course, I realize that I shall have nothing but my own four hundred a year."

He was both surprised and troubled. In the nature of things she could claim Lambourne's share in the practice, or the capital value of his share, and Hadfield had been racking his brains to think how he could meet the claim.

"By your husband's will," he said, "his interest in the practice goes to you."

She turned and looked him full in the face.

"I refuse to touch it," she said.

He was astonished, and she was quick to see his astonishment. She knew at once she would have to justify her eccentric decision.

"Jim," she said, "you can accept this wish of mine without asking for my reasons. They are purely personal reasons. They date back quite a long while."

His face had grown suddenly haggard.

"I'll not ask for your reasons, Rose; but will you tell me one thing? Is it a matter of sentiment, sacred sentiment?"

"It is a matter of sentiment," she said; "the sentiment of a woman who was not very happy."

She had put him in the most difficult of positions, for if he accepted her wish too easily it seemed to him that he might raise some suspicion in her mind as to the firm's financial stability. There were times when he passionately longed for her to know the truth, that she of all people might do him justice, and yet his whole self was concentrated on deceiving her. It never crossed his mind that they were playing a shadow show, and that she, too, was a dear deceiver. He meditated. He sat frowning in his corner of the compartment. He did not wish it to appear that he could be too easily persuaded.

"Do I understand that you wish your interest in the firm to be dealt with as an investment, that you wish to become, in fact, a sort of sleeping partner?"

"No," she said, "no."

She was extraordinarily yet gently emphatic.

"I do not intend to be a penny the richer for poor Peter's death."

His eyes expressed his belief that such an attitude was very unusual.

"I said, Jim, that it is a matter of sentiment. Surely it can be arranged?"

He pretended to consider the suggestion. Arranged? Heavens, of course it could be arranged when the firm had not a single penny to pay her!

"But don't you see," he said, arguing against himself, "that the whole practice comes to me, and that I benefit?"

She gave him a baffling look.

"No, it is not business. That is my point, dear man. I do not wish it to be business. Now, as a friend, may I ask you never to mention this to me again unless I mention it to you?"

He felt helpless, so he tried to appear fatherly.

"My dear Rose, just as you wish. But I warn you that I shall still consider myself responsible."

"Thank you," she said, and her heart added, "as if your poor shoulders had not more than enough to bear!"

At Paddington, Hadfield would have put Rosamund and her maid in a taxi and taken leave of her there, but she touched his sleeve with a gentle and intimate hand and asked him to go with her to the flat in Kensington.

"I know you are tired, but I have a horror of going back there alone. Come and break the spell for me."

He went, helped by her very need of him and his comradeship, and putting the maid and the luggage into one taxi, he drove with Rosamund to the flat in Tudor Gardens. It was growing dark when they arrived, but the girl had bustled in before them and turned on every light in the place in an endeavour to produce a sympathetic cheerfulness. Hadfield saw Rosamund wince. It was as though she saw in that artificial glare a hundred memories vividly lit up, the memories of a woman who had not been happy.

He switched off the central light in the drawing-room and left only the shaded globes burning on either side of the fireplace.

"Thank you," she said.

She was touched by his quickness, his sensibility. In the old days she had thought him rather slow and unobservant.

"Do smoke. You haven't smoked all day."

"May I?"

"Of course."

She turned to the cabinet where Lambourne had kept his cigars, but checked herself.

"A pipe. I love the smell of a pipe."

Hadfield remained with her for an hour, smoking and talking about old times, the times when they had been boy and girl together and before the brilliance of Peter

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Lambourne had dazzled her into marrying him. She sat curled up on the sofa, her face in the shadow, and he had a feeling that the strain of the last few days was passing, and that the soul of her, weary with much suffering, was sinking gently into a mood of blessed relaxation. It made him happy to think that his presence and his sympathy could help her towards tranquillity and sleep.

Presently he rose to go.

"No, no, don't move," he said. "I'll just slip away."

She smiled and gave him her hands.

"You have helped me, Jim, as no one else could have helped me."

She saw him turn away with a kind of glow upon his face, and when he had gone she sat up, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her hands. Her eyes seemed to look into the far distance.

"I must help him," she thought. "I—must—help him. But how?"



MR. WALSH'S windows looked down upon a stone-paved courtyard surrounded by the stately and pleasant melancholy of old Georgian houses. Two great plane trees grew in the courtyard, spreading a soft green gloom and catching the light upon their yellow mottled trunks. In the summer Mr. Walsh always had flowers in his window boxes, and they were the only flowers in the whole court.

A clerk brought him a card.

"A lady to see you, sir."

Mr. Walsh adjusted his eyeglass and examined the card.

"Mrs. Rosamund Lambourne. Don't know her from Adam. Ask her to come in, Luker."

He sat back in his chair and waited, scrutinizing his finger-nails and smiling, as he often smiled over an old worldling's reflections. He glanced up quickly when the woman entered, and then rose from his chair and bowed. He saw that she was in black, and also he was aware of her as a very attractive little lady who knew how to dress.

"Good morning. Please sit down."

She sat down, taking the chair on the other side of the desk. She looked at his keen, kindly and ironical face, with its humorous eyes and its slightly arched eyebrows, and she decided instantly that she had been lucky, that she had chosen the very man for her adventure. He did

not speak to her at once; he just sat and waited.

"I have come to you on a rather unusual piece of business."

"Well, Mrs. Lambourne, if you will explain it."

"I want to make money."

He was delighted. He dropped his eyeglass and his whole face lit up with sympathetic humour.

"My dear lady, is that unusual?"

"I suppose not. But sometimes the usual things are very urgent."

"Precisely. I wish that all clients were as frank and as explicit. So you have come to me! Most people come to lawyers with ideas that entail wasting money; we have to try and dissuade them. I suppose you have an idea. I think we may take it for granted that you have an idea."

They smiled at each other. She felt more and more that she had found the man she wanted.

"Yes, I have my idea. May I assure you that I am very much in earnest?"

He bowed in his chair.

"I think I feel that. Well, will you explain the idea?"

She laid her vanity bag on his desk.

"Mr. Walsh, if you look at the hoardings along a railway line, what do you see?"

"Queer you should ask me that! My train took a little nap this morning, and I observed."

"Well, what were the things that were advertised?"

"Drink, soap and gas engines."

She laughed.

"You must have struck a masculine patch! Let us imagine that we are walking up Oxford Street or Bond Street. Are they masculine or feminine?"

"Overwhelmingly feminine."

"Yes, superficially so. But what is behind the feminine? Is it not the quest or the cult of the man? Hats! It is the hat that catches or kills. I want to buy a hat shop."

He put his fingers together and looked at her intently.

"And you come to me!"

"I think that I made a happy choice," she said.

He laughed and made her another little bow.

"Now, listen. I always begin by dissuading, by raising every possible objection."

"Please begin," she said.

"Do you know anything about business or about hat shops?"

"Absolutely nothing; but I do know the particular hat for the particular woman, and I would take the trouble to supply it, and that is more than ninety per cent. of the ordinary young women can do."

"Well, supposing I grant that. I have certain evidence before me. But the running of a shop in the West End is a very expensive affair."

"I have some capital."

"How much are you prepared to risk?"

"Would four thousand pounds do?"

"My dear lady, it is a very great gamble."

"So is life," she said; "but I mean to have my gamble. I have some original ideas, and I am not afraid of work."

He looked at her intently under his sagacious eyebrows.

"Is it really necessary that you should do this?"

"It is inevitable, unless, Mr. Walsh, you can suggest something else."

He smiled and examined his finger-nails.

"No. I am not so sure that your instinct may not be right. It would be less of a gamble than many things. You will begin by losing money."

"I am prepared for that."

"You may have to provide hats—free hats—for half the charming spongers in London. Half the people will never think of paying their bills. You will have to persuade actresses to wear your presentation hats."

"I know. But, Mr. Walsh, I am going to cultivate the plain, ordinary woman. I think I know how to hook her. I have never seen it tried before. 'Come to Marietta and be given the hat which suits—you.' 'We do not design hats for any women; we create the hat for *the* woman.' Don't you see it?"

"I do," he said. "In this age of blare and glare—"

"You have to be delicately blatant, even in the matter of hats."

"That means that you will advertise?"

"I shall, but on original lines. Has anyone ever seen charmingly dressed girls walking down Regent Street and carrying little decorative placards, 'Go to Marietta for your hats!'?"

"It is an idea," he said, and laughed.

"So I am to try and find you a shop?"

"Will you? I know it is rather impertinent of me—"

"Not at all," he retorted. "This is far more fascinating than trying to persuade old gentlemen not to be vindictive in their wills."

So she left the beginnings of the adventure in Mr. Walsh's hands, nor could her inexperience have gained a better friend, for he was one of those men who seem to know everybody and a little of everybody's business. Meanwhile, she contrived to remove herself from the largeness of the Kensington flat into a much more petite affair in the neighbourhood of Baker Street. Pauline, her expensive maid, who had a genius for clothes, was given a share in a part of the secret and offered an interest in the adventure.

"I can't afford to keep you, Pauline, but if you care to stay with me and try your luck you can."

Pauline chose to stay. That was one of the secrets of Rosamund's success. She had the knack of attaching people to herself and turning them into loyal helpers and enthusiastic partizans.

Meanwhile the password in both camps was economy, and in this campaign of mutual and generous deception Hadfield had countered her change of habits. His pleasant bachelor flat in Westminster had been sub-let, and he had removed himself to a set of rooms in George Street, off the Gray's Inn Road. He spoke of them as a set of rooms, but in reality he had a bed-sitting-room on the top floor; but no one ever saw it save the landlady and the maid of all work. He clung to his club. It became his official corner when he met and entertained clients or friends. The bed-sitting-room at Number Seventy-seven, George Street was a mere sleeping berth, the secret roosting place of a lonely bird.

Yet he found himself compelled to explain it to Rosamund Lambourne.

"Well, you see, it is nearer the office. I can get off my perch more quickly. I am putting in a good many hours work."

"But what a pity to give up your flat."

"It is only a temporary measure," he assured her. "I have sub-let it furnished. I can go back there when I please."

They were mutually interested in each other's change of address, and if Rosamund's choice seemed reasonable and legitimate, Hadfield's was suggestive of a brave necessity. She asked him to tea at her little flat, but when he returned her hospitality he took her to a teashop in Regent Street

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That in itself was significant, and one morning she took the trouble to visit George Street and look at Number Seventy-seven. It was a most depressing house, in a depressing street. The windows and the front door needed repainting, the lace curtains looked yellow, the doorstep grey. A sombre cat meditated on the top of the area steps, and one of the basement windows gave her a glimpse of a dirty kitchen table and a collection of unwashed plates.

"Poor man," she thought.

She wondered how many hours he spent in that melancholy and shabby house. She had a vision of him leaving it almost furtively in the early morning and returning to it late at night, and it seemed to her that this was no small part of his renunciation, for in his quiet way he had always loved beautiful things. She went back to her own adventure with a new passion and an almost fanatical devotion.

"I will succeed," she said to herself. "Who can help to lift that burden if not I?"

Hadfield had confessed to her that he was working hard, and he was working even harder than he allowed. He arrived at the office at eight, and very often he remained there long after the staff had left. Old Sotherby had not been replaced, but Hadfield had pushed forward one of the clerks, a quiet and indefatigable Scotsman named Cameron, who was not only a worker but betrayed a readiness to accept responsibility. Cameron was a crofter's son, but he was on the high road towards qualifying as a solicitor, sitting up till one in the morning reading for his exams.

"Cameron is my man," thought Hadfield, "if I can only save the situation."

The damnable part of it was that he could not detail any responsibility. He had to shoulder everything himself and make a brave show of confidence and stability. Several old clients called after the tragedy of Lambourne's death, and Hadfield had to sit in his chair and reassure them. They had not the hardihood to ask him awkward questions, but he could divine what was at the back of their minds.

"You will find your partner a great loss, Mr. Hadfield."

"My dear sir," he would reply, "no one is indispensable. This practice is fifty years old. It has traditions."

There were times when he hated these

people, but for some of them he was bitterly sorry. He loathed having to lie to them, and yet there was nothing for him to do but lie. He was particularly sorry for old Mr. Thomas Vincit, an ex-sea captain, who had inherited a little fortune, and who had entrusted some twenty thousand pounds to Lambourne. The old man called one day. He was quiet, shy, a lovable old boy who had knocked around the world and remained simple and cheery and unaffected.

"I suppose everything is all right, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Absolutely all right."

"That's good. I ought not to have asked you such a question, but I have two pups of nephews who are always yapping."

Hadfield forced a laugh.

"May they have to yap a very long time, Mr. Vincit."

The old man winked.

"I'll give them a long run for their money," he said.

But when old Vincit had gone Hadfield sat a long while in deep and bitter thought.

"If that old sportsman should ever find out that I have lied to him! Please God he shall not find out!"

He made a vow that old Vincit's securities should have the place of honour.

But it was a dreary struggle, for whatever healthy fighting zest there was in it was marred for Hadfield by the eternal consciousness of deceit. He was frank and open by nature, and generous, and it hurt him when he happened to discover that the office staff, with the exception of Scotch Cameron, had presented him with a reputation for meanness. He overheard a debate in which Cameron argued for his chief.

"Halfpenny Hadfield," someone called him.

"It was different in Mr. Lambourne's time."

Cameron scoffed at them. He told them that half the southerners were petty suburban snobs, and that to be careful with money was not meanness.

"It's your careful man who can afford to be generous. Maybe I shall be able to buy up the lot of you in ten years' time."

But "Halfpenny Hadfield!" The phrase hurt, for however much a proud and sensitive man may despise irresponsible and cheap gossip, his very humanity is hurt by it, and his overhearing of this chatter happened on one of these particular days when he allowed himself to be human. Twice a

month he dined with Rosamund Lambourne at a little French restaurant in Soho. They took turns at paying the bill. She had insisted on that, postulating as an alternative a refusal to dine with him, and this was one of those bi-monthly golden nights.

He stood and looked at her picture on the mantelpiece.

"I wonder if you think me mean?"

No; she was above such pettiness; he believed in her.

They met in the restaurant, where Hadfield had booked a table. She had that soft and intimate smile of hers ready for him. She was charmingly dressed, and was wearing one of the most provoking of hats. Her calm, hazel eyes and her mass of amber hair gave her a mysterious distinction. She had the most curious and stimulating effect on Hadfield. He felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere of delicate sympathy and appreciation. In some subtle way she contrived to make him feel at peace with himself, to fill him with new courage, to light up all that was great and comforting in his own soul. He was more in love with her than he had ever been, but he thought that he made a wonderful concealment of his love.

She saw at once that he was tired, depressed. It was her dinner to-night, and she ordered a bottle of very exquisite red wine.

"I am going to ask you the usual question."

He glanced instantly at her hat.

"Another? It is like being the judge in a beauty competition. Each competitor distracts one."

She laughed.

"Are they all so ravishing?"

"To-night I think this one *le dernier cri*. But on the next occasion——"

"How very pleasant it is to meet you," she said.

She was in a happy mood. The mystery shop had materialized, and these hats of hers were very prophetic of an almost laughable success. She had had her troubles, her exasperations, her disappointments, but in some extraordinary way the luck of the world seemed with her. She had struck some happy, original note, sailed in on one of those waves of topical enthusiasm for some trifling novelty. It appeared that the Marietta creations were fated to sell like some lucky novel; no one knew why or how.

But she saw before her a man who was jaded and overworked. We are not aware of the subtle changes in ourselves, for we live with ourselves too much, nor did Hadfield realize that he was not the man of a year ago. Strain had not coarsened him; it had spiritualized him, deepened him. His face attracted, challenged, provoked interest, especially the interest of women.

This particular woman's eyes noted details, details which stirred in her a little tremor of tenderness. There was a frayed edge to one cuff of his shirt, and his tie was not very new. She could guess how hard up he was, how desperately hard up, and denying himself in order to try and pay off that abominable debt. For it was an abominable debt, a treacherous debt; and yet she never heard him whimper.

He would sit there and look at her with his steady and rather shy blue eyes, as though he were warming himself at a fire, quite innocent of the fact that the inward and answering glow betrayed itself in his eyes.

"I am sure you are working too hard," she said. "Why not take things more easily?"

"Oh, later on," he answered vaguely. "There is a very good man coming on in the office—a Scotch lad. I hope I shall have him with me some day."

"Do you know," she said, "that you have not had a holiday since that happened?"

"I don't need one."

"Every man needs a holiday."

"And you? I don't believe that you have been out of town."

"Oh, my life is all holiday," she laughed.

Always she longed to ask him how the struggle was going, but she had to rely upon her observation of him, on her intuition, on her impression of failure or success. One thing she did pray for in her endeavour—that he might be able to hold out until she could come to his assistance, for she had begun to realize the strange inevitableness of her success. Fashion is a fickle thing, and yet a clever woman can forefeel and forestall its very fickleness. Rosamund had been very wise. She had set out to cultivate the plain woman, and the plain woman is a surer friend than the pretty one.

"If you don't go for a holiday next year I shall take you for one."

They laughed at the idea.

"But, at least," she said, "we might

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make up a few week-end excursions. I am serious, dreadfully serious."

"I should love it," he said, and then relapsed into silence, and she understood this silence to be part of his rigid self suppression.

"Jim," she said, "I shall take you down to Hastings or somewhere, and buy you a bucket and spade and make you play on the beach!"

His eyes lit up.

"Sand castles, what! I would rather go hay-making on some Sussex farm."

"Ah, you remember that!" she thought; "and so do I—now."

So their lives went on, touching on these golden nights, and separating to consummate each its labour of dear deceit. Her effort soared, bird-like, joyous and inevitable, till old Mr. Walsh, measuring its altitude with his world-wise eyeglass, smiled half incredulously and remarked to himself, "What a world! What a woman!" Hadfield's course was like a journey through a valley of rocks where banditti and many evil mischances lurked. He climbed, but so slowly. He could not see the edge of the divide or the clear sky beyond it; any chance rock set rolling by some casual hand might thunder down and crush him. Life was one long, weary menace. There were times when he hoped, times when he despaired.

"If only Fate will give me five more years," he thought, "I may see light."

Often it seemed to him impossible that Fate, even a kindly Fate, could grant him so long a reprieve. Some damnable coincidence would arrive like a thunderbolt. A client might die. Old Vincit, for instance, was seventy-three. He might have to deal with those yapping nephews, and an exposure would be inevitable.

The strange part of it was that he never suspected Rosamund or Rosamund's adventure. He thought that she lived the easy, quiet, pleasant life of a cultured woman who was possessed of a small income, and he was content that she should live it. That she was pleasing and comely and inspiring was her abundant justification in his eyes. All hard-pushed men are grateful for a garden, some atmosphere or person which suggests repose.

Yet even he, submerged as he was in worry, became the unsuspecting observer of "Marietta's" audacious methods. It was she who originated the idea of sending

out pretty mannequins into the West End streets to advertise her creations. Hadfield hurrying for a bus after lunching at his club, met one of these smiling damsels tripping it down Regent Street. Her placard took the form of a very large and handsome vanity bag. "Marietta does not sell hats. She creates—your—hat!"

Hadfield smiled.

"What next?" he thought.

It occurred to him to wonder whether Rosamund bought her hats at "Marietta's." It seemed to him that Rosamund never bought her hats anywhere; they grew on her head like flowers.

He remained unenlightened by that most singular coincidence, when he happened to pass Marietta's establishment one December afternoon and paused with vague interest in front of the window.

"What strange ways there are of making money," he reflected; "and some of us want it so badly."

He moved aside to walk on, and nearly collided with a woman who was hurrying out of the shop. It was Rosamund Lambourne.

"Hallo!"

She flushed up, but caught her inspiration.

"How do you like my hat?"

He smiled at her, a bewitched smile.

"So you go to Marietta's?"

"I do. She sells the best hats in London."

"I agree," he said, "if all the hats I have seen you wearing came out of that shop."

"Every one of them," she said promptly. "Now, Jim, do take me out to tea."



THE oak-screened safe in Peter Lambourne's room still held its secret, but now it was Hadfield's secret, though every detail of this unhappy enterprise was scheduled and posted in a little private ledger of his own.

Here, in a list, were all the securities and investments for which the firm was responsible, and there was another list of the securities which had ceased to exist and which had to be recreated.

Mr. Thomas Vincit.

Annesley Park Estate Co., £10,000 5 per cent. debenture stock.

Southern United Gas Co., £5,000 ordinary stock.

Orient Tea Co., £5,000 ordinary stock.

Such were Hadfield's entries, and the list included five other clients who could claim smaller sums from Messrs. Lam-bourne and Hadfield.

During the first year Hadfield contrived to scrape together some seven thousand pounds, a sum which included the whole of his own private capital. His plan was to keep five thousand pounds so invested that it could be realized at short notice and used to meet any sudden call upon the firm. It was his war-chest. All moneys over and above that sum went to the slow repurchase of securities to replace those which his dead partner had pledged in his ambitious and fatal gamble.

On the first page of his little private ledger Hadfield had written the words "No gambling," and he abided by the vow. He had determined that, however hardly he might be pressed, he would never resort to a reshuffling of other people's capital, that there should be no more dipping into innocent people's pockets. The rebuilding of his credit should be slow and solid, if it was to be rebuilt at all.

From the very first day he had been compelled to take over the whole of the financial side of the practice, to keep the firm's accounts and draw all cheques. It was impossible for him to entrust it to anyone else, and the work entailed was very heavy. Sometimes he remained at the office until midnight, working alone, but often, to save appearance, he would take a file of papers back to Seventy-seven, George Street, and sit up into the small hours. He had good physique and indomitable patience, and these served him well. Each evening he allowed himself an hour's walk through the streets. He drank one glass of whisky and soda each day, and that before going to bed. It helped him to sleep.

But he had aged. He was not a man who made a study of his personal appearance, but he was growing grizzled at the temples, and if he did not notice it, other people did. His youth had left him. His face assumed those indefinable yet characteristic stigmata of middle age; there were little wrinkles here and there, a slight coarsening of the skin, a loss of the softer outlines. His chin and his cheek bones were more prominent; his eyebrows began to bush themselves out over eyes that remained steady and kind.

Rosamund saw all this, so did Cameron

the Scot. And in his precise, dogged way Cameron had developed a curious affection for James Hadfield. They were in sympathy, though without ever expressing sympathy for each other.

"Mr. Hadfield, now that I am a qualified man, sir, I could do with a little more work."

"I shall give you all I can, Cameron. I have been wondering whether you get sufficient scope here."

"I am very well satisfied, Mr. Hadfield."

Hadfield took a stroll across the room, glanced at Rosamund's portrait, and then turned on the Scot.

"Cameron, I should like you as a partner, but I can't take you yet. Perhaps—in five years' time—— But even then I can make you no promise. It is only fair that you should know this."

They looked into each other's level and steadfast eyes.

"There are difficulties, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Yes, difficulties."

"You are not for thinking me afraid of difficulties?"

"No, I'm not. But there happen to be responsibilities connected with this practice which I cannot share with any man. It would not be fair to him. I cannot tell you more, Cameron, and I rely on you not to breathe a word of this."

The Scot smiled.

"Like Alan Breck," he said, "I love a braw fighter. You'll have nothing but loyalty from me, Mr. Hadfield."

Hadfield flushed. He was touched.

"I wish I could tell you more, Cameron, but I can't. I am not forgetting your career; you are going to get on; you are the sort of man who is bound to get on; but what I am asking myself is, are you being given your proper chance here? I cannot promise you anything."

"No promise, but a man's goodwill, is sometimes the best promise, Mr. Hadfield."

"Think it over. If you care to strike out elsewhere, I shall understand."

But Cameron did not leave him, and though he was not a partner, he showed initiative and enterprise in pushing the firm's business. He was developing marked ability as an advocate, and before very long he was taking the "fighting cases" off Hadfield's hands and winning them in the courts. He was imperturbable, cheerful, full of dry and efficient humour. He began to attach clients of his own to the firm, and the practice increased.

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As for Rosamund Lambourne, the gradual vanishing of Hadfield's youth filled her with an increasing tenderness. It was not that he was becoming dull and testy; never had he interested her more than he did now, for he had grown more human, more understanding, and perhaps more witty. She saw in his lines and in his grizzled hair the marks of something obscurely heroic, a burden taken up each day and carried uncomplainingly till sleep lifted it from his shoulders. He was the most unsensational of heroes, and she loved him the better for that. She had married a sensational man, and she had had every reason to regret it.

Rosamund was ready to help him now, but somehow a sense of delicacy held her back. She understood the man's view, that if he was destined to win through, the climax would be all the more notable if he did it alone.

But there was another question to be considered.

Hadfield loved her; he had loved her for years; but she knew that so long as this secret remained a secret he would never speak to her of his love. It might be extraordinary, but he had proved himself a rather extraordinary man. Most men would have thrown out sentimental suggestions; in fact, most men would have told her. He did not.

"It is admirable," she thought, "but is it life?"

She saw the years slipping away, precious years which could never be recovered. She was beginning to feel not a little lonely, and she could guess what his loneliness must be.

He came to one of their dinners looking worried and tired. He tried to efface the impression, but his screen of cheerfulness was pathetically thin, for when a man's eyes are unhappy there can be no concealment.

"What has happened?" she wondered.

The fact was that the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield had plunged suddenly towards its crisis. A client had died, and Hadfield had had to dip deeply into his reserve in order to put this dead client's affairs in order. But that was not all. He had received a letter that morning warning him that old Thomas Vincit was very ill, and the inference was obvious. He might be called upon any day to find twenty thousand pounds, and that was impossible, unless he gambled with other people's securities as Lambourne had done, or put himself in the hands of

money-lenders; and he knew what that would mean. Fate had not given him sufficient time, a long enough breathing space. Of the thirty thousand pounds that Lambourne had lost, Hadfield had managed to reaccumulate just half of that amount.

"You look very tired, Jim."

"I have had rather a hard day."

He had had many such days, and they were beginning to tell on him. He was growing weary, so very weary that his fighting spirit was ready to drop by the roadside and sleep like some exhausted soldier. This sudden culmination of adverse coincidence had taken the heart out of him, for Fate had grown ironical just when he was beginning to believe in her benignity.

Rosamund watched him and wondered.

"Shall I tell him the truth?" she thought. "Shall I tell him everything?"

Her impulse was to open her heart to him, but she had ceased to trust blind impulses. His courage revived in the atmosphere of sympathy she created; his face lost its strained look, and his eyes grew brighter.

"You ought to have a holiday," she said.

He shook his head.

"You must have a holiday. My dear man, I shall insist on it. Here we are in July, and London like a back kitchen. Now, where are you going?"

He gave her a patient, humorous smile.

"It is quite impossible."

She leant her elbows on the table and looked steadily at his face.

"Listen," she said. "Unless you go for a holiday I shall refuse to dine with you again. Tell me where you would like to go."

"Are you serious?"

She put out a hand and touched his sleeve.

"I am serious. I ask you to take a month's rest. I don't think that I have ever asked you for anything before. Leave Cameron in charge and go."

"I don't know where to go."

"That shows that you ought to go. When we cannot get out of a groove we have to be lifted out. Is there nothing in life but work?"

He leaned back and smiled.

"Somewhere by the sea," he said.

"Yes, right away from people, from people who speak your own language. Just to lie on the sands, with the wind blowing over

you, and the blue sea tumbling at your feet."

"Well, go," she answered. "I know the very place, and not a hotel in it."

"Yes, not a hotel," he echoed.

"A friend of mine has a little cottage among the dunes over on the other side, not many miles from Dieppe. The place is called Mayeux. She wants to let the cottage for August."

He looked at her a moment with peculiar intentness.

"I should be alone there?"

"Quite. The nearest house is a quarter of a mile away. You have the sea, the dunes, the pine woods. There is an old French woman who will come in for an hour or two a day to cook and clean."

He sighed.

"It sounds perfect. Do you think your friend would wait for a week? I shall be able to decide at the end of a week."

"I will see her," she said; "but you must promise me to go."

"Business——" he protested.

"Oh, bother business! I am not going to let you kill yourself."

A queer spasm seemed to pass through him; it was momentary, a mere shock of emotion, but she noticed it.

"Promise," she said.

He promised.

It seemed more than probable to Hadfield that in the course of a week Fate would have declared herself, and that he would know whether her closed hand held disaster or good luck. If it proved to be disaster—well, nothing more would matter; he would have fought his fight and lost it. He would go away quietly to this cottage among the dunes, arrange his last elaborate deception, and then pass out into the night.

Fate did declare herself, and the very next morning. Hadfield received a telegram

from one of Thomas Vincit's nephews, announcing his uncle's death.

Uncle passed away last night. Funeral at two-thirty on Thursday.—VINCIT.

Hadfield was talking to Cameron when the telegram arrived, and he read it, laid it aside, and went on talking, yet he was conscious of a queer sense of unreality, of having suddenly passed over to some other life. It was as though the spirit of him had left his body. He heard himself talking, saying things that now seemed trivial and almost absurd. So might a man slain in action pause to look at the dead part of

himself and remember his violent and fierce moments of a moment ago.

"Mr. Vincit is dead," he heard himself saying to Cameron; "the funeral is on Thursday, but I shall not go."

"We shall act for his beneficiaries—I suppose?" said the Scot.

"I expect so. His estate goes to his two nephews. He had no other relatives. I must get out his will and look through it."

When Cameron left him he sat in his chair, staring at the opposite wall, quite still and absorbed in thought. Suddenly he smiled. What an ironical thing life was, that man should be broken and

shamed after years of self-denial and stubborn labour, for the lack of ten thousand pounds! The sum was so impossibly great, and impossibly small, a fortune to some, a mere card debt to others.

He asked himself what he was going to do.

Rake up his available capital, and try a last gamble with it, buy a mass of rotten speculative shares and play for a rise? No, that was a mug's game, and he would not play it. He might go to his bank and negotiate a loan, but they would ask for securities, and whose securities could he give? Securities that were not his? No.

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he had no intention of repeating Lambourne's experiment. There were money-lenders by the score, but he was shy of such people. He had no desire to pull his head from under a guillotine to put it in a noose.

There was no one to whom he could appeal.

No one?

He thought of Rosamund Lambourne, and told himself that he could not go to her. He had fought his fight for her sake, and he had lost it. He was a prisoner to Fate, and he was not going to ask the woman he loved to ransom him, and with her all.

Presently he locked his desk, rose, stood for a moment looking at her picture, and then took his hat and went out. In passing Cameron's room he opened the door and threw him a few words.

"I am going out for a while. I shall be back this afternoon."

He went out into the city streets. The people were like shadows, hurrying, absurdly serious shadows. Or rather, they were solid, fleshly, material creatures pre-occupied with material things, and he was the shadow. He found his way into one of the old city churches and sat there in the cool and quiet gloom, giving himself to strange reveries. He seemed to have lost consciousness of time and space, for time and space are but part of our dream.

It was late in the afternoon when Hadfield returned to his office. He had had no lunch, nor did he feel the lack of it, for the physical part of him was completely dominated by the spiritual, and his brain had cleared like a clouded sky. He knew now what he had to do, and he set about the doing of it.

He rang his bell for a clerk.

"Will you ask Mr. Cameron to give me five minutes?"

Cameron came to him, and that he saw nothing strange in Hadfield was a proof of the older man's serene fatalism.

"Cameron, I am going to take a fortnight's holiday. I shall go away early next week. Do you think you can manage?"

"Of course I can. I am glad you are taking a holiday. Why not make it a month?"

"Perhaps I will. I am rather tired. I am taking a furnished cottage on the French coast—just the sea, and the sky and the sands, you know."

"I should make it a month," said the Scot.

Hadfield was troubled about Cameron, for he respected the man and liked him, but Cameron would not be involved in the crash—in fact, he would be freed by it. He would be able to collect his own circle of clients, and join another firm, or begin life on his own, but Hadfield was hurt by the thought that this man who had been so loyal to him would be compelled to believe him a defaulter. He had thought of writing a private and confidential letter to Cameron, but he realized the unthoroughness of such a confession. If he was to carry on the illusion to the end it was better that no living soul should know that it was an illusion.

When Cameron left him he wrote a letter to Rosamund Lambourne.

"I have decided to take advantage of your suggestion, and I will take the cottage at Mayeux. If you will let me have your friend's name and address I will pay her the month's rent in advance. I suppose she will be able to supply me with a little information as to the old French madame. A lone man is so helpless!"

"Will you dine with me on the Monday? I hope to take the Newhaven-Dieppe boat on the Tuesday morning."

Mrs. Lambourne was puzzled by this letter, not by what it said, but by what it did not say, for it was the most formal letter that she had ever received from Hadfield, and she had a suspicion that it was intended to convey nothing. But why? She found it challenging all manner of conjectures, and troubling her with vague questions. That this letter should have been so different from all the other letters he had written her was sufficient to provoke the tender curiosity of a woman.

It was by chance that she happened to see in *The Times* the announcement of old Thomas Vincit's death. The name was familiar to her, so tragically familiar, linked up as it was with the memories of that night at Marley, that it suggested some instant danger. She connected Hadfield's formalism with it, his sudden decision to go away. She had his tired and worried face constantly before her eyes.

"My dear," she thought, "has Fate struck you a fatal blow after all these brave years. Are you going away to do what he did? And never a word to me! But that would be like you."

She replied at once to his letter and echoed his tone of casual calmness.

"I will see Norah Robins to-night. You can leave the details to me. I will get her to write to Mayeux, and have the cottage prepared for you by Madame Brugnion.

"I am glad you have decided to take the holiday, for you need it.

"I will be at our little place on Monday at the usual time. Till then, au revoir."

She went first to one of Thomas Cook's offices, and bought a first-class ticket to Dieppe. From Cook's she hastened to Mr. Walsh's, and surprised him with her instructions.

"I want you to withdraw all my War Bonds from the Safe Deposit Co., and I want you to alter my will."

He looked at her questioningly.

"Marietta has not suffered a reverse?"

"No, no, we are more flourishing than ever; but I think of buying a partnership in a certain concern. If the venture materializes I will tell you about it later."

"You require the whole ten thousand pounds? I believe that is the sum."

"Yes."

She nodded at him.

"Please do not look so alarmed. I have not taken to gambling. I shall be glad if you will have the bonds sent to me at my flat by special messenger on the Monday morning."

"My dear lady, it shall be done. And now, about your will?"

His eyes were slightly ironical and amused, but her calmly serious face impressed him.

"I wish everything that I possess to be left to James Hadfield, Esq., of Messrs. Lambourne and Hadfield, and of Seventy-seven, George Street."

"Everything?"

"Yes. In the event of my death——"

"My dear lady?" he exclaimed.

She gave a little, half-exultant laugh.

"Oh, I am only taking precautions. I never felt better in my life."

On the morning of the same day, James Hadfield had a visitor, the elder of Thomas Vincit's nephews, a prematurely fat man of forty of the aggressive, round-headed type. Out of breath when he reached the firm's doorway on the third floor, he pushed in, breathing hard and snuffling like a pig. His visit was a visit of aggression. He had come to conclude an uncomfortable piece of business, and he had no idea of making it less uncomfortable by carrying it through

gracefully, being the vulgar sort of man who believes a loud voice and a loud manner to be impressive and final.

He was confronted by Sandys sitting at his desk.

"Mr. Hadfield in?"

"Yes. Have you an appointment, sir?"

"No. You go and tell him that Mr. Claude Vincit is here, and that he is in a hurry."

Sandys gave him an ex-sergeant-major's look.

"I will inquire whether Mr. Hadfield can see you. Take a seat."

Hadfield smiled a rather tired and cynical smile when he heard Mr. Claude Vincit's name. He had expected some such irruption, and he was not unprepared for it.

"I will see Mr. Vincit in twenty minutes, Sandys."

"Very good, sir."

So Mr. Claude Vincit sat on a chair in the vestibule for twenty minutes, growing hotter and more aggressive under Sandys's hostile eyes—eyes which said very plainly: "I made a mistake in calling you 'sir.' I know a sahib when I see one, and you never will be one. Put that in your pipe, my fat lad, and smoke it." Mr. Vincit twirled his hat, kept pulling at his watch, and read all the bills advertising sales of real estate. Once, tall Cameron the Scot came out of his room, looked at Mr. Vincit, and went in again as though the thing displeased him.

"Here, I can't hang about all day."

Mr. Vincit got up on his thick legs.

"You go and tell Mr. Hadfield that my business is important. D'you understand—important."

Sandys did not stir.

"Mr. Hadfield will ring when he is at liberty to see you."

And it was a very aggressive and bump-tious man whom Hadfield interviewed at the end of half-an-hour.

"I'd like to tell you, Mr. Hadfield, that up in Nottingham I'm not used to being kept waiting. My time's valuable."

"And so is mine, Mr. Vincit. What can I do for you?"

"I've called for my uncle's securities."

"Indeed! You mean you wish to withdraw them?"

"I do."

Hadfield sat back in his chair.

"Certainly, Mr. Vincit. But we do not do things here at such express speed. Such

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securities as we hold shall be delivered to you in due course."

"I'd like them now."

"My dear sir," said Hadfield, very firmly, "you will not have them now. We do not transact our business in that way. Such securities as we hold shall be delivered to you and your brother when Mr. Vincit's will has been proved. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No; I may as well tell you that I am transferring my custom elsewhere."

"Just as you please, but there is a clause in your uncle's will making this firm responsible for dealing with his estate, and the clearing up of that estate. Now, if you will excuse me, I happen to be busy."

Mr. Vincit got up, a little deflated.

"I'll get my solicitor to write to you."

"Please do. Good morning."

The irruption of Mr. Claude Vincit was no more to Hadfield than the sound of a coarse voice heard for a moment in a crowded street, for he was beyond being wounded by such human blatancies. His consciousness had withdrawn itself to dwell upon a man's most sacred thoughts, and so absorbed was he in this last inward act of self-renunciation that his senses were blunted against the impressions of the outer world.

He thought continually of his last meeting with Rosamund Lambourne, and the contemplation of it always left him a little incredulous, as though he could not convince himself that it would be their last meeting.

At five o'clock on the day before his departure for Mayeux he was sitting on the edge of his bed at Seventy-seven, George Street, staring at an open suitcase which he had been packing. He had packed methodically, like a man who had unlimited time and no cares, nor had he allowed himself to be obsessed by the thought that he would never re-pack that case. He refused to be emotional. He had taken from a drawer the revolver he had salvaged from Marley, the very revolver with which Lambourne had shot himself, and he had calmly tucked it away under a neatly folded coat. He had compelled himself to be cool and practical.

But as he sat on the edge of his bed he realized that in two hours or so he would be facing Lambourne's wife across a corner table in that little Soho restaurant. The thought shocked him—the thought that after to-night he would never see her again. And perhaps for the first time in his life he was conscious of fear.

Hadfield was waiting for her at the table that had always been theirs on the nights when they had dined together. She was a little late, and as she came towards him between the tables, Nanine their waitress, who had developed a sentimental interest in these two, ran forward to take her cloak.

"Tiens, mais madame est très—très jolie ce soir!"

"Perhaps because I am happy, Nanine."

"Then monsieur will be happy—also."

Hadfield had risen. His face looked rather pale and worn as he watched the two women.

"I am late," she said; "do not scold me."

He was conscious of a sudden tremor of surprise, for she seemed to him to be different, though what the difference was he could not say. She had a more vivid look. There was mystery about her, a suggestion of some indefinable and deep tenderness which played like light with the texture of her beauty. She appeared more rich, more mature, vital with happiness—a happiness which trembled and glimmered between laughter and tears. His sense of her dearness was overwhelming.

"What weather!" she said; "you will have a perfect crossing."

She sat down. It seemed to him that every movement she made had a happy and exultant grace, that she was like music full of some significant yet untranslatable appeal, a sequence of sweet sounds which filled the heart with vague yearnings. He tried to think of something to say to her. He was obsessed, stricken by the thought that this was their last evening together.

"Just like the war," he said, and spoke the words aloud, "and one's last night on leave."

She gave him a meaning look, and picked up the wine list. "Surely not! What a way to approach a holiday! Now, what shall we drink to-night? I will supply the wine, and you shall supply the dinner."

But he would not have that.

"This is my evening, the whole of it, but you shall choose the wine."

"Thank you," she said; "do you know, I always have a secret love for Beaujolais. It is full of the aroma of many memories."

He looked at her searchingly; it was his favourite red wine, and they had so often drunk it together.

"That is for my benefit?"

"Is it?"

She pulled off her gloves, and her eyes were hidden.

"Well, perhaps, perhaps not! If we love the same things, so much the better."

He sat and stared at her; he opened his mouth to say something, and smothered that something before it was said; she was aware of his emotion, though she seemed intent upon her gloves. She saw him open the wine list, though there was no need for him to open it; his hands were trembling.

"Well, let it be Beaujolais."

He glanced up for the wine-waiter, and she saw a kind of anguished radiance on his face.

"Just like your last night's leave!" she thought. "Ah you betrayed yourself there. But you will not tell me, and I shall not ask you yet."

He was ordering the wine, and his voice was not quite under control. She opened her vanity bag, took out a mirror, looked at herself in it, put it away again, and then glanced at him with a gleam of tender mischief.

"How do you like it?"

She saw that he was lost for the moment.

"My hat?"

"Oh—your hat! Another new one! Your hats grow on your head like flowers."

"But when I begin to fade?"

"I don't think you will ever fade," he said.

"Dear man, do you know that I am thirty-five?"

"What a preposterous age!" he retorted, catching her spirit.

"It is a very serious age. At thirty-five a woman begins to think."

"What does she think about?"

"Oh, a thousand things—how unpleasant it is to have to associate with common people, how life seems to grow noisier and more blatant, how one begins to long at times for some gentle place far away in the country where you do not see the ordinary evil man, and young women with painted faces, and hear common children shrieking. Oh, this poor cheap world of to-day! I pity it, and yet I cannot love it, and I ought to love it."

"Why?" he asked her.

"Because it is so human and foolish and stupid; because it is so full of poor, crude souls. But I want to get away into the deeps and dream."

His face was very sad—sadder than he knew.

"Yes, a living sleep, far away the great peace. But why not take a cottage somewhere?"

"And bury myself? And without a comrade? No. But how serious we are, and you about to start on your holiday; it cannot be allowed. Let us drink the health of your holiday."

She raised her glass, and, touching his glass with hers, looked straight into his eyes.

"To the holiday you have earned."

She saw that he hardly touched the wine, and from that moment he could not rally to her; but he seemed to sink into a long and tender contemplation of her, a mood that listened as though she were music. It was she who talked and he who listened, and so the evening passed away.

She chose to walk home, and he walked with her, and she was aware of his face as of something luminous and silent and infinitely sad. She could guess what his thoughts were, and when she spoke to him her voice was very soft.

"Will you come in for a little while?"

But the nearness of her had become unbearable, and the sense of loss in him an acute pain. He wanted to escape, for he felt that he would blurt out words of self-betrayal, and the courage in him was growing thin.

"No, not to-night, Rose. Good-bye."

She gave him her hand, and he held it for a moment.

"Good-bye—for to-night," she said.

He was inarticulate with all the things he might have said, and he left her hurriedly, like a man taking flight from his own soul.

Seventy-seven, George Street seemed very familiar and dim and murky when he returned to it, and as he climbed the stairs to his room he noticed the cracked globes of the gas brackets and the jets turned low to save the gas. This saving of light struck him as being ridiculous, and he turned on the jet outside his room full glare. There was a hole in the stair carpet here, and he could remember catching his foot in it. The faint, stale smell of the basement kitchen floated up from below.

"Good Lord!" he thought. "After all, one is better out of it! I think I should regret nothing if only she knew the truth."

He locked his door, and sitting down on the bed, stared reflectively at his suitcase. How unsympathetic and yet how challenging inanimate things were! He

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looked at his watch. Three hours ago he had been sitting in exactly the same place, staring at the open suitcase and the neatly folded coat which hid Lambourne's revolver. Had he really dined with Rosamund Lambourne, and dined with her for the last time? How utterly preposterous it all seemed, this silly world full of absurd illusions; and surely he was the most preposterous creature in it. What had he gained by years of self-renunciation, and by a quixotic silence which persisted in being silent to the end? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! He had created his own illusion and it was killing him, and no one cared. And why the devil should they care? We are not worth the price of a telegram to most of our neighbours, and the only people who would show any feeling would be the people to whom he owed money.

He felt bitter, savage.

"Damn! Why does a man do it?"

He began to undress, and as he stood in front of the mirror and unfastened his collar and tie he looked at himself with a kind of mocking curiosity.

"In three days or so you will be dead. How does that strike you, my friend?"

It struck him as being absurd.

"Idiot! You do not know how to use a dramatic opportunity. Now, if you had been convincingly shrewd, the strong man, you would have told her the truth to-night, and something wonderful might have happened. At least, you would have gone out with dignity, a romantic figure. Romance! There is no such thing as romance. It is the way you happen to look at life when your liver is working well, and you have plenty of money. Why on earth are you doing this?"

He pulled off his shirt.

"Just to be thorough. To pat yourself on the back and say, 'You did the thing thoroughly.' And she will never know that you were anything but a seedy scamp. Well, after all, you are about the damndest fool——"

He unlaced his boots and kicked them off.

"If I want to be a damned fool I can be one, can't I?" he said aloud, addressing the wardrobe, and the wardrobe made no reply; but the occupant of the room below him turned over testily in his bed and then reflected that it really was the first time that the man upstairs had come home drunk.

Next morning he caught the boat train to Newhaven, and as he walked restlessly

up and down the platform he was conscious of the fact that he was watching for someone—for her. It was possible that a whim might send her down to see him off; but she did not appear, and he climbed into his compartment and sat there with closed eyes. His senses were abnormally alert, and he found himself acutely sensitive to noise, the silly, needless noise made by obtuse and insensitive people. A porter came along and banged the door, and Hadfield started in his corner, fiercely resentful. A sudden anger flared in him.

"What a world of fools!"

The train started, and he lay back with closed eyes and was soothed by the rattle of the wheels, for the sound was inevitable and rhythmical, and he did not resent this sound of motion. There were two people in his compartment, but he was hardly aware of them. One of them was a woman with a sucked-in lower lip, a sharp nose, and eyes that were hard behind rimless pince-nez. She watched Hadfield nearly all the time with a catlike and unblinking stare, and once he opened his eyes and met hers. A flash of instinctive hostility passed between them.

"You are not ill, are you?" asked the woman.

"Not in the least, madam."

"Well, I thought you looked ill. So inconsiderate of people to travel when they are sickening for something. And I am just starting on my holiday."

"So am I," he told her, and she appeared satisfied.

On the boat he carried his suitcase and bag as far forward as possible and made himself a little solitude away from the crowd. It was a hot and windless August day, without a cloud in the sky, and the sea like powdered lapis-lazuli and flat as glass. As they steamed out he sat and watched the houses of Seaford and the white cliffs beyond it disappear into the heat haze, telling himself that England had passed out of the little that remained to him of life. He sat and smoked, and felt the sea, its largeness, its personal indifference. Like the noise of the train, it soothed him. He began to be less intimately angry with himself, more in touch with the inevitable drift of things. The sun made him feel a little sleepy, and when the French coast rose out of the greyness he accepted it and all that it implied. He saw a sea front, a pier, hotels, bathers, grey-green hills, chalk cliffs, the great crucifix on the jetty. He looked at it

as a tired and sleepy man looks at a panorama in which he has no vital and conscious interest.

Half-an-hour later he sat in the buffet drinking soup while he waited for the train that would take him to Mayeux. In due course it took him to Mayeux. Looking out of the window, he was aware of the flat fields, and poplars all leaning in one direction, of a line of sandhills pale yellow against the blue of the sky, of belts of dark green pine. He got out at the little station with his suitcase and his bag, and asked the way to the Villa Tamarise.

His French was execrable, but the Mayeux railway porter was able to disentangle some meaning from it.

"The Villa Tamarise? Two kilometres. Take the road that crosses the line, go past a farm, and you will see the house—a white house close to the sea. No, monsieur, there is no one here to carry luggage."

So Hadfield picked up his suitcase and bag and started on his solitary walk to the cottage. Mayeux lay behind him, a little cluster of houses round the slate blue spire of a church, and as he went forward towards the dunes and the sea he seemed to wade deeper and deeper into an all-prevailing solitude, a solitude that was infinitely restful. "At last," he thought, "I shall not be stared at by anybody. I shall hear nothing but the sea and the wind in the dry grass and the pines, and no one will ask me silly questions." He felt the solitude like a soft sea breeze playing upon his heart, and he was not troubled by the weight of his suitcase and bag. He hurried to pass the farm, a square of white-walled, red-tiled buildings, seeing it as the last human question mark between him and the great silence. He walked fast. He saw no one, only two cows grazing at large over a waste of gorse and grass; and over yonder lay the sand dunes and the sea.

When Hadfield was a hundred yards past the farm he had his first sight of the cottage. It was long and low and white, with one black chimney, and he noticed that smoke was rising from the chimney, a flag warning him of Madame Brugnion's presence. He understood that she came from the farm which he had just passed, and he reflected that he could persuade her to return to the farm and not take her duties too seriously. The distant white cottage pleased him, though he neither analyzed nor questioned

his sense of pleasure. The Villa Tamarise stood back from the dunes, with a wood of pines to the east of it, and as Hadfield drew nearer he saw that the front windows of the cottage looked towards a broad gap in the sand hills, and beyond the gap flashed the sea. It occurred to him that he would be able to see the sun go down and quench itself in the blue gloom of the deep waters.

The garden, a tiny patch of ground in front of the cottage, was surrounded by a tamarisk hedge.

"*Bon soir, monsieur. Monsieur est arrivé.*"

The voice came over the tamarisk hedge, and Hadfield found himself looking into the swarthy face of the French woman. She was old and ugly; she had black moles on her face, and a moustache, and yet there was something likeable about her, a flicker of humour, an irrepressible good nature.

"Madame Brugnion?"

"Yes, monsieur. I have everything ready. Will monsieur come and see?"

Hadfield carried his luggage into the cottage, vividly reminded of those days when he had inspected many French billets and always his first care had been the bed. He saw that the cottage was very simply furnished and very clean. In the sitting-room the table was laid for dinner—the smoking chimney had suggested the preparation of a meal. Madame Brugnion was punctiliously thorough. She insisted on his visiting the two bedrooms.

"Everything is clean, monsieur."

There were two bedrooms, and Hadfield noticed that the bed in each had been made up. He was puzzled. Surely Madame Brugnion did not contemplate making her post a residential one? Rather awkwardly and in stumbling French he commented on the preparation of those two beds.

"Madame, I shall not require both!"

She laughed and gave him a queer look.

"Of course not; but I thought monsieur might like to make his choice."

He managed to answer her smile, and from the bedrooms he was led about the cottage, to be shown the kitchen arrangements and where the lamps and the coal were kept.

"Monsieur will wash in the sea, no doubt?"

He nodded.

"I shall have a little dinner ready for monsieur in half-an-hour. Perhaps he will unpack his luggage or go for a walk on the sands. When I have served monsieur's dinner I must return and take care of my husband."

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"You live at the farm?"

"Yes, monsieur!"

"You need not trouble to come back to-night, Madame Brugnon. I can look after myself till the morning."

"As monsieur pleases."

He went out, and after loitering a moment in the garden, where the tamarisk flamed pink in the evening sunlight, he strolled across the sands towards the sea. A strange tranquillity descended upon him. He was but vaguely conscious of the scene before him, the pale gold of its dunes, its silver green grass tussocks, its groves of solemn pines, its blue and peaceful sea. He noticed no details, nor did it occur to him for a moment that he was not alone here, that the solitude contained another presence, a presence other than Madame Brugnon's. He passed down between the dunes and reached the beach, where tiny waves made a moist murmur along the sands. The solitude seemed complete. He sat down close to the water's edge and watched the gentle flux and reflux of the sea. Looking out over it, he felt that he was on the very edge of the great beyond, close to the eternal sleep, the bourn of tired souls.

"I will come out here after dinner," he thought, "and watch the sun go down. I have the whole night before me."

He walked back to the cottage over the soft sand, making a detour round one of the many dunes and approaching the cottage from the direction of the farm. Madame Brugnon was standing behind the tamarisk hedge, and as she was slightly deaf and the sand muffled his footsteps, he surprised her there, her two hands parting the tamarisk tops and her face set intently towards the group of pines on the neighbouring hillock.

"Oh, la, la, monsieur! You startled me."

Her agitation was unaccountable to Hadfield. He concluded that she was highly strung, for all her swarthinness and her solid breadth of face.

"Pardon me, madame."

"Monsieur, I was looking for you. Dinner is served."

She did not re-enter the cottage, but left Hadfield to help himself, and in five minutes he had forgotten all about her, for though she was the last human figure he expected to see in this world, she cast no shadow across his mind. He found that he was hungry, and he ate a sound meal, telling himself with great reasonableness that a hungry body was no help to a man who was

setting out on that last journey. Moreover, he had much to do, many letters to write, the last figments of the illusion to lay in order. The sunlight shone in and touched the white table-cloth and the polished pinewood floor. It struck him that the cottage was very clean and wholesome, and that it had the feeling of a place that had been lived in by pleasant people.

"I'll make that all right," he thought. "I'll leave no stains here. The sea is big and clean enough for a man to die in."

His thoughts began to centre upon his death. He was aware of a sense of its inevitableness, and yet he could not realize death as a personal and imminent fact. He was rather vague about it. It had not begun to frighten him, nor did he think that he would begin to be frightened by it. He had gone too far; he had cut the one human cord that might have vibrated and set up a tremor of inward anguish. He was not going to let himself think about Rosamund Lambourne. Surely a man's death could be a business proposition, calmly conceived and calmly carried out.

When Hadfield had finished his meal he cleared the table, lit a pipe, and went out into the garden. The sun was hanging low over the sea, the tamarisk flamed still more redly, the hollows among the dunes were filling with darkness, and the pine woods threw long shadows. He saw a track of gold upon the water leading in one long shimmer to the setting sun, and it seemed to him a track along which his thoughts might travel. He would be quite alone down there, and he felt a desire in him for the last sunset, the last dusk, while he listened to those little sliding waves. When night came—well, he would light the lamp for an hour and then return to the sea and the night.

Going down from the cottage Hadfield climbed one of the dunes nearest to the sea and sat down in the coarse grass. If ever a man had the right to assure himself that he was the one figure in that little world of sandhills and of waves it was he.

His glance went northwards over a sea that was darkening to the colour of amethyst and touched an imaginary England. His imagination went beyond the white cliffs and the fields, beyond the outer suburbs, into the very heart of the life which he had left. Just twenty-four hours ago he and she had been sitting opposite each other

in that Soho restaurant. Where was she now? What was she doing?

"I made up my mind not to be sentimental," he said to himself.

Suddenly, and in contrast to all that this solitude both assumed and suggested, he felt that he was not alone. The feeling was so abrupt and so vivid that he turned quickly as he sat and looked towards the Villa Tamarise; nor did the fact that he could see no one satisfy him. He stood up, and from the vantage of the dune's top scanned the beach, the rolling sandhills, the fields towards the farm. No human thing was visible, and yet that feeling remained.

He made an attempt to ignore it. He sat down again and tried to fix his thoughts on all that he had to do. There was a letter to Cameron, that letter to her.

But should he write to her? Would not such a letter be superfluous when he had made up his mind that even that last letter should not tell her the truth?

But why should he not tell her the truth? Surely it could not hurt her now? She would not think it necessary to do some quixotic thing—offer her own private money to old Tom Vincit's yapping nephews. But it was possible that she might make some such proud and sensitive gesture. No. He decided that he would not tell her.

And then it was that the thought of death began to hurt him. He watched the sun sink into the sea, and looking towards England, felt the dusk falling like rain upon all that space of waters. He was alone now. He had lost the sense of another human presence near to him, and in his loneliness he began to weaken.

"I must tell her," he thought. "I cannot go out without knowing that she will know."

When the dusk fell Hadfield became possessed by a great restlessness. His calmness deserted him, and coming down from the dune, he began to walk up and down the sands, and sometimes the little spreading waves touched his feet. The sun had disappeared below the horizon, and the sea was growing dark under the paling sky.

His purpose had weakened, and so weak was it that he was tempted to procrastinate. "Why to-night? Why not to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow? Surely there is no hurry!" He stood and looked out over the sea, trying to persuade himself that the last act might be

postponed; but the more he temporized the more intense became his faith in immediate action. "Will it be easier to-morrow?" he asked himself. "Once shirk a crisis and you will shirk it a second time. Didn't the war teach you that. Take your fear by the throat, or you will find it your master."

He overcame his irresolution; he stifled its cries and its excuses as he walked back towards the cottage. The afterglow had faded and the night seemed to come suddenly, flowing like water over the pale sands. A few stars glimmered. He was aware of the pine groves as a wreath of blackness against the sky, or as a cloud of smoke hanging above the sand dunes. A little breeze sprang up, and he heard it rustling in the coarse grass, making a sound that emphasized the greater silence of sea and sand. The cottage was a white smudge in the increasing darkness. He remembered looking towards the farm where Marie Brugnon lived, and wondering whether he could see its lights, as a lone man drifting at sea might look for the heartening glimmer of other lights. There was nothing. He knew himself to be alone.

This sense of his own loneliness, of utter isolation, threw him back upon his own courage. He walked steadily, stubbornly towards the cottage, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, willing himself to march straight upon the final objective. He was not aware of any other presence in the darkness about him, of any watchful and tender shadow following in the footsteps of his fate. His consciousness became more and more concentrated on this last act of renunciation. It was like a clenched fist, the knotted brow of a thinker.

He reached the tamarisk hedge and paused for a moment, head up, body rigid, for he fancied that he had heard some sound; and then he explained it by the night breeze playing in the tamarisk branches, as it had played in the dry grass among the dunes. He went up the path and opened the door. The cottage was in darkness, and, being strange to it, he stumbled against a chair. He felt in his pocket for his matches and struck a light, but the draught from the door extinguished the flame. He closed the door, struck a second match, and went in search of a lamp.

Madame Brugnon had left the lamp ready on the kitchen table, and Hadfield lit it and carried it into the sitting-room.

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He had his back to the window of the room as he placed the lamp upon the table, and he did not see a face appear at the window and look in at him. It remained there for a few seconds, and then melted back into the darkness.

Strangely enough, Hadfield was conscious of a moment's uneasiness, and turning about stood listening. He went to the front door, and he could hear nothing but the breathing of the wind in the tamarisk branches. As he reclosed the door and moved back into the room he noticed that the curtains were not drawn, and it occurred to him that he had better draw them. A moment later something made him resist the impulse.

"You are getting jumpy," he thought to himself; "there is no one within a mile of this cottage."

He did not draw the curtains, and his restraint reinforced his feeling of self-mastery. Deliberately, and without haste, he set about doing what he had to do, and he began by clearing the table and bringing his suitcase in from the bedroom. From it he took a bundle of papers, his little private ledger, and Lambourne's revolver. Then he sat down, not facing the window, but with his back to it. He untied the piece of pink tape which fastened the roll of papers and sorted them out upon the table. He had brought note-paper with him.

For a while he sat and meditated, his elbows on the table, his chin resting on his hands. He remained very still. He could hear his strap-watch ticking on his wrist. Presently he moved, picked up the pen, drew a sheet of paper to him, and began to write.

Dear Rose—

He got no farther, for all the mass of repressed emotion which was in him held like a stark and silently waiting crowd through which his thoughts were unable to push. He strove with sentences which would not form themselves, and then laid the sheet aside and took a fresh one.

"Dear Cameron," he wrote, "I ask you, when you read this letter, to try and not blame me."

He succeeded better with that letter to Cameron, and he wrote on steadily, pausing now and again to think or to re-read what he had written; yet behind his intent and slightly stooping back the dark oblong of the window showed an oval patch of whiteness. Someone who had been hiding,

pressed deep into the smother of the tamarisk hedge, had moved forward across the strip of sandy garden, and now stood close to the window.

Suddenly Hadfield stood up. He had finished his letter to Cameron and was filling his pipe; but his matches were missing, and he remembered that he had left them in the kitchen. He was leaning forward, and his right hand had grasped the stem of the lamp, when he heard a knock on the cottage door, and for the moment he remained motionless, his hand still gripping the lamp. The sound had startled him quite extraordinarily. It was as though he had felt himself dead and someone had rapped on his coffin.

But action came quickly. His left hand went out, picked up the revolver, dropped it into the suitcase and closed the lid.

"I suppose it is the Frenchwoman," he thought.

He moved to the door, but he made no attempt to open it.

"Who's there?"

There was no answer, but the knock was repeated, quite a gentle knock, suggestive of mystery, of some intimate inward meaning. Hadfield felt himself trembling. The sound was so human; it set up strange vibrations in him; and yet he never suspected.

He opened the door and saw her.

She smiled up at him from under the brim of one of Marietta's hats. She had a light travelling bag in her hand, and as he stood there staring at her in voiceless astonishment she held it out to him.

"I am so tired of carrying this."

He took it from her, but he still stood in the doorway, blocking her way. The unexpectedness of her coming had overwhelmed him, and he had not yet emerged from the depths of his amazement.

"Where on earth have you dropped from?"

"The farm—Madame Brugnion's farm. But, dear man, am I to be kept on the doorstep?"

He stood back and let her in, and, closing the door after her, remained there, bag in hand, his eyes questioning her every movement. She stood by the table, taking off her hat. And then he became aware of her bag of which his right hand was gripping the handle, and he was assailed by

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the bag's suggestiveness and all that it implied. It occurred to him to wonder what the time was, and a glance at his wrist-watch told him that it was five minutes past ten.

"You came from the farm! But how?"

She laid her hat on the table, and her glance passed over the mass of papers.

"You bad man," she said.

He did not answer.

"I had a suspicion that you would bring your work with you, and that you would not take a proper holiday."

"Oh—that's nothing!" he said.

"You call it nothing. You have been reading legal documents and writing letters! Why—here is actually a piece of red tape! I am glad I came."

He made a sort of swaying movement, but his feet remained in the same spot.

"Why did you come?"

"To make sure that you took a real holiday. And I catch you on the very first night—up to your neck in work."

"Do you mean that you have come to stay here?"

"Yes."

"At the farm?"

"No, in the cottage. It holds two. Now don't be scandalized!"

"I'm not scandalized," he said; "I'm——"

"Glad?"

She sat down, and her face was half averted. She had had one glimpse of him standing there, bewildered, grimly helpless, still holding that bag. She could understand how her coming had shocked him into helplessness. He did not know what to say or what to do. He was like a man who had lit the fuse of a bomb and was trying both to hide and to extinguish it. She was conscious of her rising emotion and of his.

"I had such a quiet crossing, Jim," she said.

"Were you on my boat?"

"No; I crossed last night."

"Last night!"

She felt him hold his breath, and for a moment she left him to struggle with his own conclusions.

"But last night we were dining——"

"Well," she said, with a little upward lift of the voice, "what of it? It did not prevent me catching the night boat."

"But I walked home with you."

"But you did not see me on to bed!"

He stared at the floor as though he were looking for something that he had lost.

"And I find all this clutter, dear man. I suppose that suitcase is full of more work?"

She stretched out a hand as though to raise the lid, and was instantly aware of his extreme and passionate agitation. She knew what was there as well as he did. He was trembling, tense yet trembling; he seemed unable to move.

She withdrew her hand and glanced at him.

"Jim, isn't it about time that you put down that bag?"

He reacted to the suggestion, and with such an awkward boyishness that she wanted to jump up and kiss him. He put the bag down on a chair, produced his unlit pipe, and remembering that he still had no matches, saw in the quest of a box of matches a chance to remove that suitcase.

"Excuse me a moment, Rose. I want a light."

"Why not use one of these wretched bits of paper?"

"Oh, I have matches in my room. This is no particular ornament either."

He picked up the suitcase and bundled it into his bedroom, and she heard him groping about in the darkness, and she smiled, but her smile was very tender.

"Jim," she called, "I think I have some matches in my bag."

He returned with worried abruptness, remembering that he had left that letter to Cameron lying upon the table, and he found her with her bag on her knees and in the act of opening it. She glanced up as he entered.

"No, this is not my only piece of luggage. I have left a trunk at the farm; they are sending it down in the morning."

She bent her head again over her bag.

"Here we are. Now, smoke hard."

She handed him the matches.

"You have not asked me, Jim, if I have had any dinner."

"Have you?"

"Yes. Madame Brugnion arranged that; she is an excellent cook; I think we ought to be very comfortable here for a month."

Hadfield struck a match, and his eyes looked at her over the top of the little flame. Almost she could hear him exclaiming: "A month! Good Lord!" Next moment he was lighting his pipe. He

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threw the match into the stove and sat down.

"Did Madame Brugnion know you were coming?"

"Of course."

"That explains it," he said, but he would not tell her what it explained.

Meanwhile she was feeling for something in her bag, and Hadfield watched her hands with an air of helplessness.

"Since you seem to be such an inevitable lawyer, Jim," she said, "and the table is littered with all this stuff, I may as well add to it. Here we are."

He saw her bring out a fat, fawn-coloured envelope; the flap of it had once been sealed, but the seal was broken. She held the envelope out to him.

"Will you check these bonds for me?"

He looked at her questioningly.

"I said—check them. I want to see that the amount is correct."

Still he did not extend a hand.

"Dear man," she said, "I think you must have some form of paralysis; either you cannot hold things or cannot let them go. Please do as I ask you."

He took the envelope, withdrew the contents, and spread them on the table, a great wad of War Bonds, and his eyes betrayed his surprise.

"What's all this? You don't mean to say that you have been walking about with these in your bag?"

"Oh, I kept a pretty tight hold on the bag. Profits, Jim, three years' profits on my business."

"Your business?"

"Yes. There should be ten thousand pounds."

His pipe had gone out, and he laid it on the table. His eyes seemed to have deepened; his forehead showed great lines.

"Your business!" he repeated.

She put the bag on the floor, drew the chair in, and rested her elbows on the table.

"I suppose I have a confession to make. Have you ever heard, Jim, of Marietta's?"

"Marietta's?"

"The hat shop—perhaps the most famous hat shop in London."

Their eyes were level, and fixed intently upon each other.

"Yes. Even I have heard of Marietta's. You could not very well miss Marietta's, could you? Why, I remember catching you coming out of the shop."

"Well, I am Marietta," she said.

He just sat and looked at her, and his eyes said many things. They were very tired eyes now, and there was a sadness in them, an ironical sadness which hurt her almost as much as it was hurting him. For he was faced by the seeming mockery of her success, the absurdity of it, the ease with which she had made money by selling hats while he had failed at the last moment. And yet he had scraped together fifteen out of the thirty thousand pounds which Lambourne had lost, and he had done it with the sweat of his soul.

She, the woman, felt the edge on the bitterness of his silence.

"Yes, isn't it absurd," she said.

He sat back in his chair, looking at her hands.

"What made you do it? You had no need to do it."

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his face.

"Oh, yes, I had. A very desperate need. I had to help someone to pay a debt, at least—I wanted to help."

His glance lifted from her hands to her face.

"A debt? Whose debt?"

"Peter's," she said, and bent her head.

The effect of that one word on him was dramatic, and yet he was the least dramatic of men. He sprang up and stood over her, and his face was a cloud of many emotions.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"You knew all the time?"

"Yes, all the time."

"But—how—did you come to know?"

"Jim, on that evening—I was in the garden, the loggia. The window was open and I heard. At first I could not believe it. Then—I could not believe that a man could take up such a burden in silence and carry it. But you took it, and you carried it, and you have carried it all these years. It was then that I began to believe."

The lamplight caught his face as he bent over her.

"Believe. In what?"

"In a man," she said softly.

There was silence for a moment. His face had an awed, inward look, but he did not move when she reached out across the table and picked up the sheaf of bonds.

"Jim—these are yours."

"Mine!"

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"They belong to the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield. Take them."

Instantly she was aware of his resistance, and she had expected him to resist, for she had gone through this scene with him many times in her forward thoughts. She knew that for him there would be an element of humiliation in a woman's rush to rescue him, even though he loved that woman, and he would resist rescue. He had a very Victorian attitude towards certain problems; he was far less modern than she was.

"Rose, I can't take your money. It is quite impossible."

"Because a woman made it?" she asked him, with the gentlest of irony.

"No, not that. I hope I am not so narrow as that. There is another reason."

He went to the window, and, opening it, stood looking out into the darkness.

"May I know that reason?"

He was silent for a while, and she turned in her chair and leant her arms on the back of it.

"Jim," she said, "surely—you can tell—me."

"To tell you," he answered, "is harder than—"

"Oh, my dear," she said, "do you think that I cannot guess?"

He turned round and faced her.

"What have you guessed?"

"Only that my great day has come, my most dear opportunity. Jim, can you not understand that I have worked for it, and waited for it?"

His face was white and stubborn.

"I'm bankrupt," he said; "the firm can't meet its liabilities. I tried, but the time was too short."

"It was Mr. Vincit's death?"

"Yes."

"And what is the deficiency—now?" she asked.

He seemed about to speak, but no words came. His eyes were looking at those bonds lying upon the table, and the significant coincidence appeared to paralyse his power of speech. The two sums were identical.

"I cannot tell you," he said presently.

"Does that mean that ten thousand pounds is not enough? I can wire for more to-morrow."

"I cannot tell you," he said, and turned again to the window.

She watched him for a moment. Then

she saw a little tragic movement of his shoulders, and instantly her heart cried out in her. She rose and went to him, and thrust a hand under his arm.

"Jim, I know why you won't tell me."

He did not answer, for he was beyond answering her for the moment.

"I shall have to tell you," she said.

His head went down, and her fingers closed upon his arm.

"Jim, I am so lonely. Why won't you understand?"

She felt him trembling. She was conscious of a struggle within him, some tense inward effort, and then he turned to her, and looked down into her face.

"If I did not——" he began.

He saw her eyes fill with light.

"If you did not love me," she prompted, "and if I did not love you! Well, I do love you, dear. Doesn't that make everything seem absurdly simple?"

He spread his arms, blindly, gropingly, and the next moment she had his head upon her shoulder.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "be happy, as I am happy. Be proud—as I am proud. I want you. Do you want me?"

"I have wanted you for years," he blurted; "it was for you that I tried——"

"I know," she said, with a hand on his head, "I know. The firm of Lambourne and Hadfield has made good. I am a rich woman, Jim, not because I have made a lot of silly money, but because——"

He raised his face and looked at her.

"That? Dear God, how good life seems!"

"It is good."

And then he kissed her, and her smile was full of the exultation of new life.

"Jim," she said, "is there any reason why your sleeping partner should not carry on this other business a little longer? Say for a year or two? Then—Marietta can sell herself!"

For the first time that evening she saw him smile.

"No under the circumstances, I consider——"

"That our holiday—our holiday—is going to be a real holiday. And rather happy?"

"Yes," he said.

And drawing her towards the door he opened it, and they went out together to where sea and sand and sky met.

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By Warwick Deeping

"Hadfield sat rigid. He felt anger within him, incredulous, scornful anger; but it was anger that could not be expressed. He realized it as he sat there beside this whimpering, dying friend; he felt that some almost unbearable burden had been laid upon his shoulders, and that it was his fate to bear it."

I

THE MAN TAKES UP HIS BURDEN



HADFIELD received two telegrams on that June day. The first was from his partner, Peter Lambourne, and it seemed of such little importance that Hadfield crumpled up the paper and dropped it into the waste-paper basket beside his desk.

"Sorry. Feeling a bit seedy. Not coming to town to-day."

The second telegram reached Hadfield about half-past four in the afternoon, and it had been sent by Lambourne's wife.

"Please come at once. Peter has had an accident.—Rose."

Sandys, the office commissionaire, was standing in the open doorway, waiting to be told whether the telegram needed an answer, and he saw nothing potentially dramatic in the figure seated at the desk. James Hadfield, the junior partner, was one of those quiet men who live their lives unostentatiously, and who end by becoming gardeners or collectors of china or old books. He was rather shy. He had little humorous wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. People said of the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield, solicitors, "Oh, yes, Hadfield's a thorough chap, steady and all that, but Lambourne is the firm; Lambourne has the brains."

"Sandys," said the man at the desk, in that leisurely voice of his.

"Sir?"

"Look me out the next two trains to Marley. Order me a taxi, and tell Mr. Sotherby I want him."

Sandys withdrew, and Sotherby—the firm's confidential clerk—took Sandys's place.

"Mr. Sotherby, I am going at once to Marley. Mr. Lambourne has had an accident."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"The message does not say. I shall have to break two appointments. Will you please see the people and explain."

"Certainly, sir. Shall I try to arrange the appointments for to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you will. I shall be here at nine to-morrow."

So James Hadfield drove off in his taxi to Paddington and caught a train for Marley, where Lambourne had a cottage on the river. He settled down in the corner of his first-class compartment and watched the June country sweep by as they travelled towards the sunset, nor was he conscious of any urgent feeling of suspense. Lambourne was a man who always made the most of a scratch or a sore throat, and it is doubtful whether Hadfield would have responded so swiftly to the appeal had it not carried the signature of Lambourne's wife.

He saw haymakers at work late, loading and carrying the hay, and the imagined fragrance of the sun-dried grass provoked memories that were both pleasant and sad. The yellow sunlight, the shorn fields, the wagons spilling over with their grey-green loads, created for him a sudden atmosphere in which Rosamund Lambourne seemed to move. He had always admired his partner's wife. Years ago, before Lambourne had met her, Hadfield had seen her in the hayfields with the sunlight in her hair.

"I wonder how she has liked it," he thought, "at the bottom of her heart?"

Had she found happiness with Lambourne—Lambourne, who was ambitious, brilliant, witty, and full of the restlessness of the climber? She was a woman who put on an air of happiness as she put on her frocks—charmingly and with

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fastidious care; but Hadfield had never been able to convince himself that her happiness was as satisfying as her frocks.

"Exactting fellow, Peter. Always wanting flattery. Curious how some men must have their cup of flattery before they can stand up and speak!"

The train pulled up at Marley and Hadfield got out. The station seemed asleep; it convinced you that nothing exciting ever happened here. A porter yawned as he collected the few tickets. And Marley was like its station, red and sun-steeped and slothful, lying lazily in the green hollow of its trees. Hadfield took the familiar turning by the churchyard wall, where the yews were black and the old elder trees dropped a heavy perfume when in flower. Everything seemed supremely peaceful.

"I suppose Lambourne has twisted that knee of his punting," he thought, "or cut himself shaving!"

His mood was faintly ironical. He had no fore-feeling of any tragedy, or that he was walking towards a catastrophic uprooting of his own quiet habits, an overturning of his own philosophy of life. He remembered afterwards how he paused to smell a rose that hung over a garden fence.

He came to the lane that led to Lambourne's week-end cottage. He saw the flicker of the aspens, and heard the river rushing over the weir; the high woods were full of arrows of gold.

In the lane he met a man, a rather worried-looking man, and obviously the doctor. His eyes gave a gleam of relief. He stopped.

"Excuse me, is it Mr. Hadfield?"

"Yes."

"I am very glad you have come. Mr. Lambourne has had an accident. He is dying."

Hadfield was aware of a queer, tense feeling in the muscles of his back.

"Dying! What do you mean?"

"He shot himself, accidentally it seems. Cleaning a revolver. The old story."

"Good God!"

"He has been asking for you, worrying for you to come. He is conscious."

They looked at each other. Then Hadfield made a movement towards the cottage.

"I'm glad I came," he said. "You will be here again soon?"

"Yes; but it is quite hopeless. Chest, you know; internal bleeding; it is only a question of time."

Hadfield walked on. He opened the

gate as though there were no gate there, and moved up the familiar path between its red and white standard roses. He found himself standing in the little lounge hall, talking to Rosamund Lambourne. She was calm, disastrously calm, with that frozen horror giving her a tense self-mastery. Her eyes had a blind look, and her face made Hadfield think of one of those white roses.

"I am glad that you have come," she said.

She pointed to the door of the dining-room.

"He is in there; he has been asking for you. We dared not move him upstairs!"

Her voice ran strangely level.

"They say that he is dying. I cannot believe it. I suppose one never can realize death when it comes."

Hadfield stood tongue-tied, looking at the door behind which Peter Lambourne lay dying. He was not an eloquent man, and there were many things which he wished to say, but he was unable to say them. Moreover, he was rendered even more inarticulate by her tragic composure. It made him think of a fine shell of brittle glass which might break and fall to pieces under the touch of even the gentlest hand.

"Yes, it is like that," he said. "I can't tell you how—"

He caught himself up, for her eyes said, "Please—please do not speak to me—now."

She made a movement towards the door, but he was quick to forestall her, sensing her fear of that door.

"All right. I'll go in. Your pluck is wonderful, Rose. I always knew it."

He opened the door, entered the room, and closed the door behind him. The room was half darkened and seemed to smell of pungent drugs. He saw Lambourne lying on the sofa, propped up on pillows, and his face was like the face of some ivory figure. He was breathing rapidly, with quick, shallow breaths; his face expressed infinite and agonized distress.

"Jim! Thank God!"

He spoke in a whisper, and made a feeble beckoning movement with one hand; but though his voice was weak, every syllable was distinct.

"Quick! Come here. I want to get it over. She—she must not know."

Hadfield sat down beside the sofa. He became aware suddenly of a sense of impending tragedy, a tragedy which involved him in its anguish.

"How did it happen?"

Lambourne laid a cold hand on his wrist.

"Hadfield," he said, "it was not an accident. I shot myself, but I bungled it. Cowardice! I wanted to go out like a coward, and even now I am a coward. No, don't speak. Listen. I'm going quickly. I have got to tell you a terrible thing."

Hadfield nodded. He felt strangely chilled.

"Man, I have been gambling, and I have lost. It has been going on for months—but the money was not mine."

"Not yours?"

"No; it was clients' money, trust money. I pledged clients' securities. I was sure—so sure—that the thing would come off, but I had the damndest luck."

Hadfield sat rigid. He felt anger within him, incredulous, scornful anger; but it was anger that could not be expressed. He realized it as he sat there beside this whimpering, dying friend; he felt that some almost unbearable burden had been laid upon his shoulders, and that it was his fate to bear it.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me everything."

He sat and listened to the disastrous, breathless tale of an ambitious man's adventures. He was shocked, amazed by the disloyalty of the thing, the crass selfishness of it. He saw all that Lambourne's confession implied—ruin to innocent people, shame, bankruptcy, prosecution for fraud. But while he listened he found that he was not thinking of Lambourne, nor even of himself, but of that woman somewhere in the house, that woman who had enough to bear, and who did not know.

"Is that all?" he asked at last.

Lambourne lay back and looked at him. There was fear in his eyes, fear of this other man's grim gentleness.

"Yes, all. But why don't you curse me, Jim?"

He saw Hadfield smile, a strange, inward smile.

"Would that help? So you have lost all the Vincit trust money, old Barter's securities, some thirty thousand pounds?"

The dying man winced and said nothing for a moment.

"You will never forgive me, Jim. I don't ask to be forgiven; but if only——"

Their eyes met. Hadfield saw the anguish of an appeal in the other man's eyes.

"If it can be hushed up."

"Yes, if!"

He rose and went and stood by the window. He felt bewildered, distraught, as though all the familiar landmarks of life had suddenly crumbled away and disappeared. He was conscious of a ghastly sense of insecurity, of things slipping away from under him, yet this very feeling of insecurity made the soul of him reach out and grasp at something solid. He thought of the office he had left less than two hours ago, with its rows of black deed boxes, its atmosphere of respectable solidity, its staff of clerks, old Sotherby's grey head bent over his files and ledgers. Was all that to go? He thought of his bachelor flat in Kensington, his books, his quiet life with its ideals, his own very sensitive pride. Yet there was no great spasm of emotion rising from these thoughts, and he needed emotion.

"I must fight," he thought.

And for what?

The answer came to him swiftly. He turned about with a suggestion of fierceness and returned to the sofa.

"You say that she does not know?"

"Rose knows nothing."

"You swear that?"

A spasm of emotion passed over Lambourne's face.

"Man, if only she could be kept from knowing! Her own money is safe, about ten thousand pounds; I never touched it. But if she could be spared——"

Hadfield sat down beside the sofa.

"The shame—exactly. But are you thinking of her? No, not altogether."

He gripped Lambourne's wrist.

"Your vanity—what? You want her to go on believing in you; you want to pass out of the picture with a little romantic strut. What damned vain things we are, Lambourne! We cry out that we wish to spare others, but we are thinking of ourselves."

Lambourne made an abject yet appealing gesture with his left hand.

"Don't, man, don't! I'm stripped naked. Isn't it bad enough to find oneself out, and to have to die with the knowledge of it? Can't I have one illusion left me—her illusion. Can't I have that?"

He looked up into Hadfield's face, and Hadfield rose and went again to the window. He saw the garden sloping to, the river, the greenness, the sheen of the water, the dying sunlight on the quiet trees. Peace, beauty, tranquillity. Yes, it was here. An hour ago his own soul had been full of it, but now——

He was conscious of an overwhelming

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melancholy, and interpenetrating it a strange tenderness. He was not thinking of Lambourne—he was thinking of Lambourne's wife.

He turned again to the dying man.

"It might be done," he said.

And then he smiled.

"You will go, Peter, but someone must live to keep up the illusion. I am that person. I have got to live and try to pay back thirty thousand pounds."

Lambourne rose suddenly to a half-sitting posture on the sofa. His white face seemed to strain forward into the half darkness of the room.

"Jim, you—you'll do it—try to do it?"

"Yes."

"And not let her know?"

"And not let her know."

"God—God bless you!"

He tried to hold out a hand, but it was the end with him, and Hadfield caught him by the shoulders as he fell back upon the pillows. A sudden great pity stirred in the younger man.

"All right, Peter—all right, old man."

"Fetch—fetch her. I'm going."

Hadfield gave one last glance at him and walked quickly towards the door.

The lounge hall was empty and he crossed it to the drawing-room, calling softly but clearly, "Mrs. Lambourne—Rose!"

She did not answer him, and he found the drawing-room empty; but as he turned back into the hall he saw her come suddenly in from the garden by way of the loggia and the garden door.

"Rose! It is very near. He wants you."

She came towards him quite suddenly, but as she passed him in the dusk of the hall she gave Hadfield one quick yet lingering look, but she did not utter a word. He had a strange feeling that he had seen the ghost of her, and not the living woman. She had looked at him fixedly, with an expression of bewilderment and wonder, and he did not suspect that he had inspired that look, and that her very obvious emotion was a new light burning beside the old. He saw her as a woman moving half blindly in the fog of a great grief. She was bewildered by the suddenness of it, and her bewilderment was natural.

She opened the door and entered, while Hadfield stood motionless in the middle of the hall, watching the closed door and thinking his own thoughts.

"I am glad I promised him that."

He felt himself deeply moved, carried away and above himself by the flood of

that generous impulse, not regretting, now that those suffering eyes of hers had set a seal upon his promise.

"She shall never know," he said.

His throat felt dry and thick. He wanted to be alone, out there somewhere where the green world and the water met, and to sit in silence, feeling the twilight fall like the fulfilment of a dream. Everything was changed; but the green world, the river and the sunsets were the same. He went out and down through the garden, where the roses and the clove pinks mingled their perfumes. He was both exultant and sad, yet into his sadness crept a little glimmer of ironical laughter, like the occasional mocking note in the song of a bird. "Why did you do it? For her—for her! Fool, fool!" He found the punt lying by the bank, and he stepped into it and sat down on the cushions. His eyes had a far-away look; they were years younger, dreamy, the eyes of a very young man, and as he sat there he smiled. His vision of the future was vivid and complete, and mocking in its completeness, and yet he smiled.

"Like some old sentimental tale," he thought.

But another voice in him cried "No!" and cried it with such fierceness that he ceased to smile and sat grim and rigid.

Silence—and thirty thousand pounds! What did it mean? He understood, he foresaw the long, secret struggle, the solitude, the suspense, the sordid worries, the celibate and lonely future, the silence that would shut out sympathy. He would have to bear it alone. He could tell no one, not even her. He would never be able to tell her, and that spelt renunciation.

"Oh, man," he thought, "what a chain you have laid upon me. In saving her illusion of you—I lose her."

And then he faced the fact that he might fail, and the more he considered it the more probable the failure seemed. He would be living and working in a rotten building, a building that would exist on sufferance, and which any sudden mischance might push down—the fussiness of a mistrustful client, a death, a whim. Everything depended upon confidence. He would have to pay the interest on that misappropriated money while he was making every effort to re-accumulate the capital. He would have to put all his own savings into the concern, and they were but a tithe of what he needed.

"Yes, it looks pretty black," he thought. "Even if I succeed, I shall

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have to live the life of a galley slave. But am I going to be scared by that?"

He was scared by it, but he reacted against his own fear.

"Well, I never thought that I should be the man to lead such a forlorn hope! How little we can foresee what life has in store for us."

Suddenly he became conscious of the twilight and of the darkening face of the river; the aspens shivered, the trees were turning black, the grass growing grey. He looked up towards the garden, for he fancied that he had heard a sound of movement, perhaps no more than the fluttering of roosting birds in the foliage. And then he saw her. She came down the grass path to the water's edge, her white dress more white in the twilight. She stood there, looking down at him.

"It is all over," she said.

Her eyes were two circles of blackness. She seemed calm yet awed, and he remembered wondering why she did not weep. He had heard of that dry and stark grief which cannot ease itself with tears, and perhaps this grief was hers.

"What poor things words are," he said.

She made a movement towards the punt, and he gathered that she wished to join him, and he was conscious of a deep thrill of wonder and exultation. That she should need him, be drawn to him at such a moment in her life! He stood up and helped her into the punt, and leaving her the cushions, went to the other end and sat down upon the raised planking. He was still in his city clothes, incongruous clothes in such a place, but they would be his slave's dress and were symbolical.

"I cannot understand how it happened," she said.

Hadfield did not look at her. He stared at the water.

"Just tragic carelessness. We are all of us tragically careless at times."

She said nothing for a while, and if her silence was suggestive it did not suggest to Hadfield that she was more alive to the liveness of the live man than to the silence of the dead one. It simply never occurred to him that she might suspect; he would have been amazed had he realized that she knew.

"I suppose it was an accident?"

"Of course it was an accident. Peter had no reason—"

"No reason—at all?"

"None."

"No business worries?"

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"None."

He lied calmly and with a gentle cheerfulness, looking down the length of the punt towards her as though they were discussing some immaterial thing. She avoided his eyes. Her pose was pensive, meditative, as she sat there dipping her hands in the water, and he remained silent, thinking that silence was what she needed, the silence of a man's sympathy. The darkness gathered about them; the reflections began to die out of the water, and it became black and obscure.

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his face.

"Everything will be on your shoulders now."

He managed to smile.

"My burden is small compared to yours."

"Is it?" she said vaguely. "Is it?"

She made a little restless movement, and the punt swayed slightly.

"Can you stay here to-night? I should like you to stay here to-night."

"Of course," he said.

"And you have had no dinner! I must see to that."

"Oh, I can go down to the inn."

"No," she said. "No, I cannot permit that. I like to feel you here."

He leant towards her, and his voice betrayed his emotion.

"Rose, you are not to worry about anything. Leave everything to me. This is the time when a friend can be of use, and I want to be of use. I'm afraid life is going to be rather horrible for you for the next few days."

She looked at him in the darkness.

"There will have to be an inquest?"

"I am afraid there is no help for it; but I shall be there with you, and I can prove that Peter had no worries—that the thing was a pure accident."

She bent her head and was silent for fully half a minute.

"You are a very good man, Jim," she said presently. "I am glad that you are my friend."

II

THE MAN BEGINS TO BEAR HIS BURDEN

As James Hadfield entered the doorway of No. 5 Gresham Place he realized as he had not realized before that he was entering a prison house, a place of bondage.

He had slept hardly at all, and his parting with Rosamund Lambourne had

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been hurried and a little self-conscious. He was seeing life and its possibilities with the cold eyes of the morning; the world of reality looked grey, and a wind was ruffling the river and troubling the foliage of the trees.

"Come back to-night," she had said to him. "I feel that I want you here."

He had promised to go back, and the thought that she needed him gave him new courage. For he needed courage, courage of a high order, the courage which suffers yet will not surrender. He was alone, utterly alone, and he was made to realize it that very day.

Immediately he opened the outer door of the office he realized that the office knew, not of Lambourne's defalcations, but of his death. He was conscious of a moment of tenseness; he seemed to be making his entry upon a stage to play a part which was difficult and strange.

Sandys, the commissionaire, raised his bald head from the morning paper and stood up.

"Good morning, sir. Very bad news, sir, this."

"It is, Sandys, very."

So it was out already! Was not a man to be allowed a moment of quiet breathing before the newsmongers hustled after him, ready to make money out of suffering and tears? He met old Sotherby in the passage—old Sotherby, whose long and carefully betrousered legs looked like two deal boards. He always reminded Hadfield of a stork, and this morning he appeared to be a very melancholy stork.

"Is it true, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Quite true, unfortunately."

"Dear, dear; it is a blow to the firm."

Hadfield set his teeth. He had a moment's anger, an anger that was followed by a desire for bitter laughter. A blow to the firm! By God, it was that, but not the blow old Sotherby and the rest of them believed it to be. He was struck by the irony of the situation—the man who had seemed so brilliant lying dead, while the illusion of his brilliance lived, and he, the plain man, had to carry the dead illusion on his back.

"There is someone waiting to see you, sir."

"Who is it?"

"A pressman, I think."

Hadfield's blue eyes filled with a momentary glare of anger.

"As if one had not enough to do!" he said, and went in to tackle the newsmonger.

He told his first lie, and told it glibly

and with a touch of scorn, to an alert young man in spectacles.

"Yes, a most unfortunate and tragic accident."

"I suppose it was an accident, Mr. Hadfield?"

Hadfield gave him a quick stare.

"I beg your pardon."

The young man's trade lived on self-assurance, but he wilted a little under that stare.

"I—mean—it is so necessary to prevent misleading information getting about."

"Quite so," said Hadfield. "Mr. Lambourne was cleaning an old service revolver, and what has happened so often to other men happened to him. He hadn't a care in the world. That's all. I must ask you to excuse me. I am very busy."

He got rid of the pressman, rang for Sandys, and gave him very definite orders as to admitting any more of that ilk; yet hardly had he disposed of one infliction than he was harassed by another. It was necessary for him to go through Lambourne's private papers. He had brought the dead man's keys with him, and leaving his own private room, he took his place in that of his dead partner. It was the post of honour and of danger, and yet a far more comfortable and sumptuous room than the one he had left, for Lambourne had always loved comfort and the luxury of beautiful things, and this room betrayed it. Hadfield, sitting in Lambourne's Sheraton arm-chair behind his exquisite bureau, looked round the room and saw in its rich details—the carpet, the prints upon the walls, the china on the mantelpiece—evidences of Lambourne's attitude towards life. It had always been something of a pose, studied, cleverly impressive.

In one corner stood Lambourne's private safe, screened by a casing that he had made up out of old oak panelling.

"My dear chap, why look at ugly things?"

How well he remembered the dead man's assumption of a sensitive fastidiousness. Ugly things! Yes, and Lambourne had studied the ugliness of exteriors, of surfaces that showed, and to Hadfield it was the inside of the safe which seemed ugly. It was his business to open it and lay bare its inward ugliness, uncover his dead partner's lapses, and then reclose its heavy door upon an illusion.

He was standing by the safe and selecting a key on Lambourne's key-

ring, when he heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said, feeling vaguely impatient.

Old Sotherby entered. It seemed to Hadfield that he looked greyer than usual, drier, more precise. Moreover, he was uncomfortable, obviously uncomfortable, and at great pains to appear natural and at ease.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hadfield, may I have a few words with you on a personal matter?"

"Certainly, Mr. Sotherby. Sit down."

But Sotherby did not sit down. He remained standing very stiff and straight, his arms pressed against his body like two wings.

"It may seem a rather inopportune moment, sir, for me to choose, but Mr. Lambourne's death has been a great shock to me. As a matter of fact, I had been contemplating retiring."

A slight frown showed on Hadfield's forehead.

"You wish to leave us?" he said.

"It is with regret, sir, but the shock of this affair—"

"You want to go at once?"

"It has quite unnerved me."

They looked at each other, and old Sotherby's eyes seemed to narrow and his face to grow corpse-like and inscrutable. To Hadfield it expressed fear, a cunning and careful cautiousness, and he was shocked by it and by the unpleasant thoughts it provoked. Did the man know anything? Did he suspect anything? Or was it instinct, a vague feeling that something was wrong, something in which he did not wish to be involved?

"Just as you please, Mr. Sotherby," he said. "As you say, your choice is a little inopportune."

"It is, Mr. Hadfield. I admit it; but I assure you that I feel quite incapable of giving proper attention. I am not so young, sir, as I was."

He moistened his thin lips with the point of his tongue.

"I was very attached to Mr. Lambourne."

Hadfield controlled his desire to blurt out something ironical and bitter.

"Very good, Mr. Sotherby. When you please. I shall be here to carry on!"

When the door had closed on Sotherby Hadfield sat down again in Lambourne's chair and threw the keys on the desk. He had not the heart for the moment to open that safe; he felt immensely discouraged, embittered, and conscious of his loneliness as a man is conscious

of physical pain. He saw himself involved in a life of subterfuges and of lies, in a world of pretence, bluffing, gambling, doing all the things that the soul of him hated. There was no one in whom he could confide, no one to whom he could go for sympathy, and that was the most damnable part of all.

"Why should I do it?" he thought. "Why the devil should I do it? Better a smash or an exposure than years of sordid, sneaking drudgery—for what?"

He left the chair and moved restlessly about the room, tempted as he had never before been tempted, and the devil had him alone.

"Think what it means! Seven years' savings swallowed up; you will be poor as a rat; you will have to slave here day in, day out, for you will never be able to take a partner until the mess is cleared. And at any moment you may be found out. Someone may want to withdraw their securities. And you are making yourself an accomplice. If you fail, as it is more than likely you will fail, you will be disgraced, you will go to prison. Is it worth it, just to save a vain fool's reputation?"

That is what his worldly wisdom said to him, and for a minute or more he listened, until his glance fell upon a photograph which stood on Lambourne's mantelpiece—a photograph of Lambourne's wife. For the sake of a woman men have done many fine and many dastardly things, but in looking at Rosamund Lambourne's picture Hadfield knew that life utters sayings which are beyond the ken of worldly wisdom. A man may be madly generous and be right; he may be carefully wise and be proved a selfish fool.

He took the photograph into his hands. He was not a sentimental man. His feelings ran very deep, and did not often reach the surface.

"I have got to go through with it," he said, looking at her face, "for your sake, and for the sake of all that you stand for."

He smiled. He could not help thinking how easy this difficult life would be if he had her for a comrade and could go to her for sympathy. What a fool Lambourne had been not to take her more deeply into his life.

"Yes, but he was too shallow," he thought; "that was the whole trouble."

He replaced the portrait on the mantelpiece, telling himself that it should remain there, ever present to be gazed at and to help him in bad hours. She had given him his inspiration, and

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the inspiration enlarged itself like a landscape emerging from a fog. Sitting in Lambourne's chair, with the door locked between him and the outer world, and the telephone receiver removed from its bracket, he saw things in a richer and a more significant light than he had seen them an hour ago. He remembered the innocent people whom Lambourne's restless ambition had ruined.

"If I tell lies," he thought, "if I play a part in order to make their losses good, am I not justified? It is the motive which matters. These people will gain nothing by my telling the truth; they may regain everything if I can carry this gamble through. Does not the greater courage keep silent and strive in silence to make good what has been lost? Even if I fail they cannot suffer more bitterly."

He turned in his chair and glanced again at the woman's face.

"I'll do it," he said, "if it kills me."

And so he set quietly to work. He explored the secrets of that safe and faced facts which now failed to frighten him. He even found an adventurous and reckless sting in them. "If she knew," he thought. He interviewed clients, worked calmly through a mass of business, and pushed the idle, gossiping office back to work. He felt calm, strangely calm, raised above himself.

"I shall see her to-night," he kept thinking. "She must be saved all pain."

At eight o'clock he was at Marley.

He found her in the garden, sitting under the weeping ash at the far end of the lawn. He noticed that she glanced up quickly when he appeared, and that her eyes watched him all the way across the lawn. The hollow shell of the tree seemed to throw a soft green gloom about her, and from the midst of it her eyes seemed to ask some question.

"How good of you to come back," she said.

Already she was in black, and he thought that no colour had ever suited her so well.

"I wanted to come," he answered.

"You must be tired. Such a day tells on one."

Again he was aware of something questioning in her eyes, a mysterious curiosity.

"Oh, I am fairly tough," he said gently. "Don't worry about me."

He took a chair beside her, and she produced some letters.

"Dr. Brandreth has been extraordinarily kind. He has done all sorts

of things for me. I gave him your name, and he left this for you."

She handed him a letter, and he opened it, read it, and then put it away in his pocket.

"It is about the—the inquest."

She nodded.

"Brandreth has seen the coroner, and they had fixed the inquest for to-morrow evening at the Marley Arms."

"You will come?" she asked.

"Of course. I shall give evidence. I can assure the jury that Peter had no worries."

"I am glad you can do that," she said softly; but he was looking towards the river, and he did not see in her eyes the things that she left unsaid.

Nor did Hadfield know that in one short day he had become another man to her, a man of strange surprises, of fascinating silences and self-restraints. She had discovered in him the fineness, the quiet yet quixotic generosity which many a woman dreams of and never finds. Her marriage had disillusioned her; she had ceased to believe in certain of her ideals, and she had touched the edge of a period of cynicism. And now suddenly this tragic thing had happened and shown her, in a man who had seemed ordinary and familiar, a courage and strength that re-inspired dreams that had seemed dead.

"I can hardly believe it," she thought; "and yet I heard—I know."

And so, on a June evening, in that long, bare room in the Marley Arms, these two people watched each other with secret wonder and delight. Farmers, shopmen, plain men sat together on the Windsor chairs on one side of the coroner's table. The evening sunlight flooded into the room. Other figures were grouped opposite the men of the jury. A police constable stood at the door. Once he disappeared to drive away a group of shouting children.

Hadfield heard Rosamund Lambourne give her evidence, and in watching her he was more than ever the silent lover of her calmness and her dignity. He asked for repose in a woman, dignity, and a delicate sense of humour, and as she stood there in that long room he knew that she was suffering, but that her pride hid it like a mask. She did not parade her emotion as common women parade it, feeling that for once in their dull lives they hold the centre of the stage and must make the most of it. She despised the crowd as much as he did, and the crowd thought her cold.

In due course he took her place in front of the coroner's table, and she sat by the window, watching and listening. She saw his face in profile. He stood very straight, yet without any stiffness, his hands resting on the back of a chair. He, too, had dignity, the easy dignity of the man of the world. He gave his evidence very calmly, with a frank and almost friendly simplicity that put him in sympathy with the twelve plain men on the Windsor chairs. He was convincing.

"Your partner had no financial worries?"

"Absolutely none. He was a very successful man."

"You know of no reason why he should have taken his own life?"

"There was no reason. It was an accident."

Lambourne's wife sat there and marvelled at his calmness, at the quiet way in which he had taken an almost unbearable burden upon his shoulders and yet hid the burden from the world. To her this seemed the very highest form of courage, for it was secret and unsensational and it asked for no reward, and she saw in it a blunt challenge to the materialism of the modern world. To ask for no reward was to confess oneself a failure, to stand in the gutter while the noisy great went by.

"I never knew him until now," she thought.

In an hour the whole melancholy business was at an end. Lambourne's death had been a tragic accident. The jury recorded the obvious verdict and went back to their farms and their shops. Hadfield returned to the cottage with Rosamund Lambourne. He was silent, nor was she in a mood to talk, yet his very silence gave him the impression of a quiet exultation, of some brave act well and silently done.

"I have a room at the inn," he said, pausing at the gate. "You will let me arrange everything?"

"You are carrying so much—already."

"No," he said, and smiled.

She opened the gate and stood a moment facing him.

"I should like him to be here in Marley, and when it is over I want to go back to the little flat in town. Will you take me back?"

"Of course," he said.

She turned away, but faced him again.

"Will you arrange to sell this place and everything—everything in it? Yes, I wish it. Good night. You have been so good to me. I shall not forget."

Three days later they were standing together on the platform of Marley station. The funeral had been a very quiet one. The few relatives who had come to it had gone, and James Hadfield was taking Rose Lambourne away from Marley. Her maid was in charge of the luggage, and Hadfield and his dead partner's wife had walked to the far end of the platform, where there was a little garden, and whence it was possible to see the hanging beech woods above the river. They stood side by side in silence, the man as though he were on guard beside her, she looking towards the woods with eyes which said farewell.

"I shall never come here again," she said suddenly.

"No?"

"There are some memories which it is impossible to forget. What a patchwork life is!"

He nodded. He did not know whether her memories were bitter-sweet or unlovely; he did not ask her, and she did not tell him. Reticence is sacred and precious to people who are proud.

The train was signalled, and presently they heard the sound of it along the hollow of the green valley.

"I have reserved a carriage," he said.

She gave him a quick glance.

"You think of everything."

When they were locked in their reserved compartment and the train had left Marley under the edge of the sunset, Hadfield offered her one of the papers which he had bought, and taking up a magazine, prepared to efface himself. He thought that she would be glad of his silence and of his effacement, and that her mood was one of meditation. She accepted the paper, but she did not read it. He noticed that she looked out of the window and left the paper lying on her knees. He made a great pretence of being absorbed in his magazine, knowing that sensitive sorrow hates being watched.

Twenty minutes passed, and suddenly she spoke to him.

"I shall take another flat, a smaller one. Of course, I realize that I shall have nothing but my own four hundred a year."

He was both surprised and troubled. In the nature of things she could claim Lambourne's share in the practice, or the capital value of his share, and Hadfield had been racking his brains to think how he could meet the claim.

"By your husband's will," he said, "his interest in the practice goes to you."

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She turned and looked him full in the face.

"I refuse to touch it," she said.

He was astonished, and she was quick to see his astonishment. She knew at once that she would have to justify her eccentric decision.

"Jim," she said, "you can accept this wish of mine without asking for my reasons. They are purely personal reasons. They date back quite a long while."

His face had grown suddenly haggard.

"I'll not ask for your reasons, Rose; but will you tell me one thing? Is it a matter of sentiment, sacred sentiment?"

"It is a matter of sentiment," she said; "the sentiment of a woman who was not very happy."

She had put him in the most difficult of positions, for if he accepted her wish too easily it seemed to him that he might raise some suspicion in her mind as to the firm's financial stability. There were times when he passionately longed for her to know the truth, that she of all people might do him justice, and yet his whole self was concentrated on deceiving her. It never crossed his mind that they were playing a shadow show, and that she, too, was a dear deceiver. He meditated. He sat frowning in his corner of the compartment. He did not wish it to appear that he could be too easily persuaded.

"Do I understand that you wish your interest in the firm to be dealt with as an investment, that you wish to become, in fact, a sort of sleeping partner?"

"No," she said, "no."

She was extraordinarily yet gently emphatic.

"I do not intend to be a penny the richer for poor Peter's death."

His eyes expressed his belief that such an attitude was very unusual.

"I said, Jim, that it is a matter of sentiment. Surely it can be arranged?"

He pretended to consider the suggestion. Arranged? Good God, of course it could be arranged when the firm had not a single penny to pay her!

"But don't you see," he said, arguing against himself, "that the whole practice comes to me, and that I benefit?"

She gave him a baffling look.

"No, it is not business. That is my point, dear man. I do not wish it to be business. Now, as a friend, may I ask you never to mention this to me again unless I mention it to you?"

He felt helpless, so he tried to appear fatherly.

"My dear Rose, just as you wish. But I warn you that I shall still consider myself responsible."

"Thank you," she said, and her heart added, "as if your poor shoulders had not more than enough to bear!"

At Paddington Hadfield would have put Rosamund and her maid in a taxi and taken leave of her there, but she touched his sleeve with a gentle and intimate hand and asked him to go with her to the flat in Kensington.

"I know you are tired, but I have a horror of going back there alone. Come and break the spell for me."

He went, helped by her very need of him and his comradeship, and putting the maid and the luggage into one taxi, he drove with Rosamund to the flat in Tudor Gardens. It was growing dark when they arrived, but the girl had bustled in before them and turned on every light in the place in an endeavour to produce a sympathetic cheerfulness. Hadfield saw Rosamund wince. It was as though she saw in that artificial glare a hundred memories vividly lit up, the memories of a woman who had not been happy.

He switched off the central light in the drawing-room and left only the shaded globes burning on either side of the fireplace.

"Thank you," she said.

She was touched by his quickness, his sensibility. In the old days she had thought him rather slow and unobservant.

"Do smoke. You haven't smoked all day."

"May I?"

"Of course."

She turned to the cabinet where Lambourne had kept his cigars, but checked herself.

"A pipe. I love the smell of a pipe."

Hadfield remained with her for an hour, smoking and talking about old times, the times when they had been boy and girl together and before the brilliance of Peter Lambourne had dazzled her into marrying him. She sat curled up on the sofa, her face in the shadow, and he had a feeling that the strain of the last few days was passing, and that the soul of her, weary with much suffering, was sinking gently into a mood of blessed relaxation. It made him happy to think that his presence and his sympathy could help her towards tranquillity and sleep.

Presently he rose to go.

"No, no, don't move," he said. "I'll just slip away."

By Warwick Deeping

She smiled and gave him her hands.

"You have helped me, Jim, as no one else could have helped me."

She saw him turn away with a kind of glow upon his face, and when he had gone she sat up, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her hands. Her eyes seemed to look into the far distance.

"I must help him," she thought. "I—must—help him But how?"

III

THE WOMAN BEGINS TO HELP

MR. WALSH'S windows looked down upon a stone-paved courtyard surrounded by the stately and pleasant melancholy of old Georgian houses. Two great plane trees grew in the courtyard, spreading a soft green gloom, and catching the light upon their yellow mottled trunks. In the summer Mr. Walsh always had flowers in his window boxes, and they were the only flowers in the whole court.

A clerk brought him a card.

"A lady to see you, sir."

Mr. Walsh adjusted his eyeglass and examined the card.

"Mrs. Rosamund Lambourne. Don't know her from Adam. Ask her to come in, Luker."

He sat back in his chair and waited, scrutinizing his finger-nails and smiling, as he often smiled over an old worldling's reflections. He glanced up quickly when the woman entered, and then rose from his chair and bowed. He saw that she was in black, and also he was aware of her as a very attractive little lady who knew how to dress.

"Good morning. Please sit down."

She sat down, taking the chair on the other side of the desk. She looked at his keen, kindly and ironical face, with its humorous eyes and its slightly arched eyebrows, and she decided instantly that she had been lucky, that she had chosen the very man for her adventure. He did not speak to her at once; he just sat and waited.

"I have come to you on a rather unusual piece of business."

"Well, Mrs. Lambourne, if you will explain it."

"I want to make money."

He was delighted. He dropped his eyeglass and his whole face lit up with sympathetic humour.

"My dear lady, is that unusual?"

"I suppose not. But sometimes the usual things are very urgent."

"Precisely. I wish that all clients were as frank and as explicit. So you have come to me! Most people come to lawyers with ideas that entail wasting money; we have to try and dissuade them. I suppose you have an idea. I think we may take it for granted that you have an idea."

They smiled at each other. She felt more and more that she had found the man she wanted.

"Yes, I have my idea. May I assure you that I am very much in earnest?"

He bowed in his chair.

"I think I feel that. Well, will you explain the idea."

She laid her vanity bag on his desk.

"Mr. Walsh, if you look at the boardings along a railway line, what do you see?"

"Queer you should ask me that! My train took a little nap this morning, and I observed."

"Well, what were the things that were advertised?"

"Drink, soap and gas engines."

She laughed.

"You must have struck a masculine patch! Let us imagine that we are walking up Oxford Street or Bond Street. Are they masculine or feminine?"

"Overwhelmingly feminine."

"Yes, superficially so. But what is behind the feminine? Is it not the quest or the cult of the man? Hats! It is the hat that catches or kills. I want to buy a hat shop."

He put his fingers together and looked at her intently.

"And you come to me!"

"I think that I made a happy choice," she said.

He laughed and made her another little bow.

"Now, listen. I always begin by dissuading, by raising every possible objection."

"Please begin," she said.

"Do you know anything about business or about hat shops?"

"Absolutely nothing; but I do know the particular hat for the particular woman, and I would take the trouble to supply it, and that is more than ninety per cent. of the ordinary young women can do."

"Well, supposing I grant that. I have certain evidence before me. But the running of a shop in the West End is a very expensive affair."

"I have some capital."

"How much are you prepared to risk?"

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"Would four thousand pounds do?"

"My dear lady, it is a very great gamble."

"So is life," she said; "but I mean to have my gamble. I have some original ideas, and I am not afraid of work."

He looked at her intently under his sagacious eyebrows.

"Is it really necessary that you should do this?"

"It is inevitable, unless, Mr. Walsh, you can suggest something else."

He smiled and examined his finger-nails.

"No. I am not so sure that your instinct may not be right. It would be less of a gamble than many things. You will begin by losing money."

"I am prepared for that."

"You may have to provide hats—free hats—for half the charming spongers in London. Half the people will never think of paying their bills. You will have to persuade actresses to wear your presentation hats."

"I know. But, Mr. Walsh, I am going to cultivate the plain, ordinary woman. I think I know how to hook her. I have never seen it tried before. 'Come to Marietta and be given the hat which suits—you.' 'We do not design hats for any women; we create the hat for—the—woman.' Don't you see it?"

"I do," he said. "In this age of blare and glare—"

"You have to be delicately blatant, even in the matter of hats."

"That means that you will advertise?"

"I shall, but on original lines. Has anyone ever seen charmingly dressed girls walking down Regent Street and carrying little decorative placards, 'Go to Marietta for your hats!'"

"It is an idea," he said, and laughed. "So I am to try and find you a shop?"

"Will you? I know it is rather impertinent of me—"

"Not at all," he retorted. "This is far more fascinating than trying to persuade old gentlemen not to be vindictive in their wills."

So she left the beginnings of the adventure in Mr. Walsh's hands, nor could her inexperience have gained a better friend, for he was one of those men who seem to know everybody and a little of everybody's business. Meanwhile she contrived to remove herself from the largeness of the Kensington flat into a much more petite affair in the neighbourhood of Baker Street. Pauline, her expensive maid, who had a genius

for clothes, was given a share in a part of the secret and offered an interest in the adventure.

"I can't afford to keep you, Pauline, but if you care to stay with me and try your luck you can."

Pauline chose to stay. That was one of the secrets of Rosamund's success. She had the knack of attaching people to herself and turning them into loyal helpers and enthusiastic partizans.

Meanwhile the password in both camps was economy, and in this campaign of mutual and generous deception Hadfield had countered her change of habits. His pleasant bachelor flat in Westminster had been sub-let, and he had removed himself to a set of rooms in George Street, off the Gray's Inn Road. He spoke of them as a set of rooms, but in reality he had a bed-sitting-room on the top floor; but no one ever saw it save the landlady and the maid of all work. He clung to his club. It became his official corner when he met and entertained clients or friends. The bed-sitting-room at No. 77 George Street was a mere sleeping berth, the secret roosting place of a lonely bird.

Yet he found himself compelled to explain it to Rosamund Lambourne.

"Well, you see, it is nearer the office. I can get off my perch more quickly. I am putting in a good many hours work."

"But what a pity to give up your flat."

"It is only a temporary measure," he assured her. "I have sub-let it furnished. I can go back there when I please."

They were mutually interested in each other's change of address, and if Rosamund's choice seemed reasonable and legitimate, Hadfield's was suggestive of a brave necessity. She asked him to tea at her little flat, but when he returned her hospitality he took her to a teashop in Regent Street. That in itself was significant, and one morning she took the trouble to visit George Street and look at No. 77. It was a most depressing house, in a depressing street. The windows and the front door needed repainting, the lace curtains looked yellow, the doorstep grey. A sombre cat meditated on the top of the area steps, and one of the basement windows gave her a glimpse of a dirty kitchen table and a collection of unwashed plates.

"Poor man," she thought.

She wondered how many hours he spent in that melancholy and shabby house. She had a vision of him leaving

it almost furtively in the early morning and returning to it late at night, and it seemed to her that this was no small part of his renunciation, for in his quiet way he had always loved beautiful things. She went back to her own adventure with a new passion and an almost fanatical devotion.

"I will succeed," she said to herself. "Who can help to lift that burden if not I?"

Hadfield had confessed to her that he was working hard, and he was working even harder than he allowed. He arrived at the office at eight, and very often he remained there long after the staff had left. Old Sotherby had not been replaced, but Hadfield had pushed forward one of the clerks, a quiet and indefatigable Scotchman named Cameron, who was not only a worker but betrayed a readiness to accept responsibility. Cameron was a crofter's son, but he was on the high road towards qualifying as a solicitor, sitting up till one in the morning reading for his exams.

"Cameron is my man," thought Hadfield, "if I can only save the situation."

The damnable part of it was that he could not detail any responsibility. He had to shoulder everything himself and make a brave show of confidence and stability. Several old clients called after the tragedy of Lambourne's death, and Hadfield had to sit in his chair and reassure them. They had not the hardihood to ask him awkward questions, but he could divine what was at the back of their minds.

"You will find your partner a great loss, Mr. Hadfield."

"My dear sir," he would reply, "no one is indispensable. This practice is fifty years old. It has traditions."

There were times when he hated these people, but for some of them he was bitterly sorry. He loathed having to lie to them, and yet there was nothing for him to do but lie. He was particularly sorry for old Mr. Thomas Vincit, an ex-sea captain, who had inherited a little fortune, and who had entrusted some twenty thousand pounds to Lambourne. The old man called one day. He was quiet, shy, a lovable old boy who had knocked around the world and remained simple and cheery and unaffected.

"I suppose everything is all right, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Absolutely all right."

"That's good. I ought not to have asked you such a question, but I have two pups of nephews who are always yapping."

Hadfield forced a laugh.

"May they have to yap a very long time, Mr. Vincit."

The old man winked.

"I'll give them a long run for their money," he said.

But when old Vincit had gone Hadfield sat a long while in deep and bitter thought.

"If that old sportsman should ever find out that I have lied to him! Please God he shall not find out!"

He made a vow that old Vincit's securities should have the place of honour.

But it was a dreary struggle, for whatever healthy fighting zest there was in it was marred for Hadfield by the eternal consciousness of deceit. He was frank and open by nature, and generous, and it hurt him when he happened to discover that the office staff, with the exception of Scotch Cameron, had presented him with a reputation for meanness. He overheard a debate in which Cameron argued for his chief.

"Halfpenny Hadfield," someone called him.

"It was different in Mr. Lambourne's time."

Cameron scoffed at them. He told them that half the southerners were petty suburban snobs, and that to be careful with money was not meanness.

"It's your careful man who can afford to be generous. Maybe I shall be able to buy up the lot of you in ten years time."

But "Halfpenny Hadfield!" The phrase hurt, for however much a proud and sensitive man may despise irresponsible and cheap gossip, his very humanity is hurt by it, and his overhearing of this chatter happened on one of those particular days when he allowed himself to be human. Twice a month he dined with Rosamund Lambourne at a little French restaurant in Soho. They took turns at paying the bill. She had insisted on that, postulating as an alternative a refusal to dine with him, and this was one of those bi-monthly golden nights.

He stood and looked at her picture on the mantelpiece.

"I wonder if you think me mean?"

No; she was above such pettiness; he believed in her.

They met in the restaurant, where Hadfield had booked a table. She had that soft and intimate smile of hers ready for him. She was charmingly dressed, and was wearing one of the most provoking of hats. Her calm, hazel

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eyes and her mass of amber hair gave her a mysterious distinction. She had the most curious and stimulating effect on Hadfield. He felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere of delicate sympathy and appreciation. In some subtle way she contrived to make him feel at peace with himself, to fill him with new courage, to light up all that was great and comforting in his own soul. He was more in love with her than he had ever been, but he thought that he made a wonderful concealment of his love.

She saw at once that he was tired, depressed. It was her dinner to-night, and she ordered a bottle of very exquisite red wine.

"I am going to ask you the usual question."

He glanced instantly at her hat.

"Another? It is like being the judge in a beauty competition. Each competitor distracts one."

She laughed.

"Are they all so ravishing?"

"To-night I think this one *le dernier cri*. But on the next occasion——"

"How very pleasant it is to meet you," she said.

She was in a happy mood. The mystery shop had materialized, and these hats of hers were very prophetic of an almost laughable success. She had had her troubles, her exasperations, her disappointments, but in some extraordinary way the luck of the world seemed with her. She had struck some happy, original note, sailed in on one of those waves of topical enthusiasm for some trifling novelty. It appeared that the Marietta creations were fated to sell like some lucky novel; no one knew why or how.

But she saw before her a man who was jaded and overworked. We are not aware of the subtle changes in ourselves, for we live with ourselves too much, nor did Hadfield realize that he was not the man of a year ago. Strain had not coarsened him; it had spiritualized him, deepened him. His face attracted, challenged, provoked interest, especially the interest of women.

This particular woman's eyes noted details, details which stirred in her a little tremor of tenderness. There was a frayed edge to one cuff of his shirt, and his tie was not very new. She could guess how hard up he was, how desperately hard up, and denying himself in order to try and pay off that abominable debt. For it was an abominable debt, a treacherous debt; and yet she never heard him whimper.

He would sit there and look at her with his steady and rather shy blue eyes, as though he were warming himself at a fire, quite innocent of the fact that the inward and answering glow betrayed itself in his eyes.

"I am sure you are working too hard," she said. "Why not take things more easily?"

"Oh, later on," he answered vaguely. "There is a very good man coming on in the office—a Scotch lad. I hope I shall have him with me some day."

"Do you know," she said, "that you have not had a holiday since that happened?"

"I don't need one."

"Every man needs a holiday."

"And you? I don't believe that you have been out of town."

"Oh, my life is all holiday," she laughed.

Always she longed to ask him how the struggle was going, but she had to rely upon her own observation of him, on her intuition, on her impression of failure or success. One thing she did pray for in her endeavour—that he might be able to hold out until she could come to his assistance, for she had begun to realize the strange inevitableness of her success. Fashion is a fickle thing, and yet a clever woman can forefeel and forestall its very fickleness. Rosamund had been very wise. She had set out to cultivate the plain woman, and the plain woman is a surer friend than the pretty one.

"If you don't go for a holiday next year I shall take you for one."

They laughed at the idea.

"But, at least," she said, "we might make up a few week-end excursions. I am serious, dreadfully serious."

"I should love it," he said, and then relapsed into silence, and she understood this silence to be part of his rigid self-suppression.

"Jim," she said, "I shall take you down to Hastings or somewhere, and buy you a bucket and spade and make you play on the beach!"

His eyes lit up.

"Sand castles, what! I would rather go hay-making on some Sussex farm."

"Ah, you remember that!" she thought; "and so do I—now."

So their lives went on, touching on these golden nights, and separating to consummate each its labour of dear deceit. Her effort soared, bird-like, joyous and inevitable, till old Mr. Walsh, measuring its altitude with his world-wise eyeglass, smiled half in-

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credulously and remarked to himself, "What a world! What a woman!" Hadfield's course was like a journey through a valley of rocks where banditti and many evil mischances lurked. He climbed, but so slowly. He could not see the edge of the divide or the clear sky beyond it; any chance rock set rolling by some casual hand might thunder down and crush him. Life was one long, weary menace. There were times when he hoped, times when he despaired.

"If only Fate will give me five more years," he thought, "I may see light."

Often it seemed to him impossible that Fate, even a kindly Fate, could grant him so long a reprieve. Some damnable coincidence would arrive like a thunderbolt. A client might die. Old Vincit, for instance. Thomas Vincit was seventy-three. He might have to deal with those yapping nephews, and an exposure would be inevitable.

The strange part of it was that he never suspected Rosamund or Rosamund's adventure. He thought that she lived the easy, quiet, pleasant life of a cultured woman who was possessed of a small income, and he was content that she should live it. That she was pleasing and comely and inspiring was her abundant justification in his eyes. All hard-pushed men are grateful for a garden, some atmosphere or person which suggests repose.

Yet even he, submerged as he was in worry, became the unsuspecting observer of "Marietta's" audacious methods. It was she who originated the idea of sending out pretty mannequins into the West End streets to advertise her creations. Hadfield, hurrying for a bus after lunching at his club, met one of these smiling damsels tripping it down Regent Street. Her placard took the form of a very large and handsome vanity bag. "Marietta does not sell hats. She creates—your—hat!"

Hadfield smiled.

"What next?" he thought.

It occurred to him to wonder whether Rosamund bought her hats at "Marietta's." It seemed to him that Rosamund never bought her hats anywhere; they grew on her head like flowers.

He remained unenlightened by that most singular coincidence, when he happened to pass Marietta's establishment one December afternoon and paused with vague interest in front of the window.

"What strange ways there are of making money," he reflected; "and some of us want it so badly."

He moved aside to walk on, and nearly

collided with a woman who was hurrying out of the shop. It was Rosamund Lambourne.

"Hallo!"

She flushed up, but caught her inspiration.

"How do you like my hat?"

He smiled at her, a bewitched smile.

"So you go to Marietta's?"

"I do. She sells the best hats in London."

"I agree," he said, "if all the hats I have seen you wearing came out of that shop."

"Every one of them," she said promptly. "Now, Jim, do take me out to tea."

IV

THE MAN FACES DEFEAT

THE oak-screened safe in Peter Lambourne's room still held its secret, but now it was Hadfield's secret, though every detail of this unhappy enterprise was scheduled and posted in a little private ledger of his own.

Here, in a list, were all the securities and investments for which the firm was responsible, and there was another list of the securities which had ceased to exist and which had to be recreated.

Mr. Thomas Vincit.

Annesley Park Estates Co., £10,000
5 per cent. debenture stock.

Southern United Gas Co., £5,000
ordinary stock.

Orient Tea Co., £5,000 ordinary stock.

Such were Hadfield's entries, and the list included five other clients who could claim smaller sums from Messrs. Lambourne and Hadfield.

During the first year Hadfield contrived to scrape together some seven thousand pounds, a sum which included the whole of his own private capital. His plan was to keep five thousand pounds so invested that it could be realized at short notice and used to meet any sudden call upon the firm. It was his war-chest. All moneys over and above that sum went to the slow repurchase of securities to replace those which his dead partner had pledged in his ambitious and fatal gamble.

On the first page of his little private ledger Hadfield had written the words "No gambling," and he abided by that vow. He had determined that, however hardly he might be pressed, he would never resort to a reshuffling of other people's capital, that there should be no more dipping into innocent people's

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pockets. The rebuilding of his credit should be slow and solid, if it was to be rebuilt at all.

From the very first day he had been compelled to take over the whole of the financial side of the practice, to keep the firm's accounts and draw all cheques. It was impossible for him to entrust it to anyone else, and the work entailed was very heavy. Sometimes he remained at the office until midnight, working alone, but often, to save appearances, he would take a file of papers back to 77 George Street and sit up into the small hours. He had good physique and indomitable patience, and these served him well. Each evening he allowed himself an hour's walk through the streets. He drank one glass of whisky and soda each day, and that before going to bed. It helped him to sleep.

But he had aged. He was not a man who made a study of his personal appearance, but he was growing grizzled at the temples, and if he did not notice it, other people did. His youth had left him. His face assumed those indefinable yet characteristic stigmata of middle age; there were little wrinkles here and there, a slight coarsening of the skin, a loss of the softer outlines. His chin and his cheek bones were more prominent; his eyebrows began to bush themselves out over eyes that remained steady and kind.

Rosamund saw all this; so did Cameron the Scot. And in his precise, dogged way Cameron had developed a curious affection for James Hadfield. They were in sympathy, though without ever expressing sympathy for each other.

"Mr. Hadfield, now that I am a qualified man, sir, I could do with a little more work."

"I shall give you all I can, Cameron. I have been wondering whether you get sufficient scope here."

"I am very well satisfied, Mr. Hadfield."

Hadfield took a stroll across the room, glanced at Rosamund's portrait, and then turned on the Scot.

"Cameron, I should like you as a partner, but I can't take you yet. Perhaps—in five years' time— But even then I can make you no promise. It is only fair that you should know this."

They looked into each other's level and steadfast eyes.

"There are difficulties, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Yes, difficulties."

"You are not for thinking me afraid of difficulties?"

"No, I'm not. But there happen to

be responsibilities connected with this practice which I cannot share with any man. It would not be fair to him. I cannot tell you more, Cameron, and I rely on you not to breathe a word of this."

The Scot smiled.

"Like Alan Breck," he said, "I love a braw fighter. You'll have nothing but loyalty from me, Mr. Hadfield."

Hadfield flushed. He was touched.

"I wish I could tell you more, Cameron, but I can't. I am not forgetting your career; you are going to get on; you are the sort of man who is bound to get on; but what I am asking myself is, are you being given your proper chance here? I cannot promise you anything."

"No promise, but a man's goodwill, is sometimes the best promise, Mr. Hadfield."

"Think it over. If you care to strike out elsewhere, I shall understand."

But Cameron did not leave him, and though he was not a partner, he showed initiative and enterprise in pushing the firm's business. He was developing marked ability as an advocate, and before very long he was taking the "fighting cases" off Hadfield's hands and winning them in the courts. He was imperturbable, cheerful, full of dry and efficient humour. He began to attach clients of his own to the firm, and the practice increased.

As for Rosamund Lambourne, the gradual vanishing of Hadfield's youth filled her with an increasing tenderness. It was not that he was becoming dull and testy; never had he interested her more than he did now, for he had grown more human, more understanding, and perhaps more witty. She saw in his lines and in his grizzled hair the marks of something obscurely heroic, a burden taken up each day and carried uncomplainingly till sleep lifted it from his shoulders. He was the most unsensational of heroes, and she loved him the better for that. She had married a sensational man, and she had had every reason to regret it.

Rosamund was ready to help him now, but somehow a sense of delicacy held her back. She understood the man's view, that his pride might be hurt, that if he was destined to win through, the climax would be all the more notable if he did it alone.

But there was another question to be considered.

Hadfield loved her; he had loved her for years; but she knew that so long as

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this secret remained a secret he would never speak to her of his love. It might be extraordinary, but he had proved himself a rather extraordinary man. Most men would have thrown out sentimental suggestions; in fact, most men would have told her. He did not.

"It is admirable," she thought, "but is it life?"

She saw the years slipping away, precious years which could never be recovered. She was beginning to feel not a little lonely, and she could guess what his loneliness must be.

He came to one of their dinners looking worried and tired. He tried to efface the impression, but his screen of cheerfulness was pathetically thin, for when a man's eyes are unhappy there can be no concealment.

"What has happened?" she wondered.

The fact was that the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield had plunged suddenly towards its crisis. A client had died, and Hadfield had had to dip deeply into his reserve in order to put this dead client's affairs in order. But that was not all. He had received a letter that morning warning him that old Thomas Vincit was very ill, and the inference was obvious. He might be called upon any day to find twenty thousand pounds, and that was impossible, unless he gambled with other people's securities as Lambourne had done, or put himself in the hands of money lenders; and he knew what that would mean. Fate had not given him sufficient time, a long enough breathing space. Of the thirty thousand pounds that Lambourne had lost, Hadfield had managed to reaccumulate just half of that amount.

"You look very tired, Jim."

"I have had rather a hard day."

He had had many such days, and they were beginning to tell on him. He was growing weary, so very weary that his fighting spirit was ready to drop by the roadside and sleep like some exhausted soldier. This sudden culmination of adverse coincidences had taken the heart out of him, for Fate had grown ironical just when he was beginning to believe in her benignity.

Rosamund watched him and wondered.

"Shall I tell him the truth?" she thought. "Shall I tell him everything?"

Her impulse was to open her heart to him, but she had ceased to trust blind impulses. His courage revived in the atmosphere of sympathy she created; his face lost its strained look, and his eyes grew brighter.

"You ought to have a holiday," she said.

He shook his head.

"You must have a holiday. My dear man, I shall insist on it. Here we are in July, and London like a back kitchen. Now, where are you going?"

He gave her a patient, humorous smile.

"It is quite impossible."

She leant her elbows on the table and looked steadily at his face.

"Listen," she said. "Unless you go for a holiday I shall refuse to dine with you again. Tell me where you would like to go."

"Are you serious?"

She put out a hand and touched his sleeve.

"I am serious. I ask you to take a month's rest. I don't think that I have ever asked you for anything before. Leave Cameron in charge and go."

"I don't know where to go."

"That shows that you ought to go. When we cannot get out of a groove we have to be lifted out. Is there nothing in life but work?"

He leaned back and smiled.

"Somewhere by the sea," he said.

"Yes, right away from people, from people who speak your own language. Just to lie on the sands, with the wind blowing over you, and the blue sea tumbling at your feet."

"Well, go," she answered. "I know the very place, and not a hotel in it."

"Yes, not a hotel," he echoed.

"A friend of mine has a little cottage among the dunes over on the other side, not many miles from Dieppe. The place is called Mayeux. She wants to let the cottage for August."

He looked at her for a moment with peculiar intentness.

"I should be alone there?"

"Quite. The nearest house is a quarter of a mile away. You have the sea, the dunes, the pine woods. There is an old French woman who will come in for an hour or two a day to cook and clean."

He sighed.

"It sounds perfect. Do you think your friend would wait for a week? I shall be able to decide at the end of a week."

"I will see her," she said; "but you must promise me to go."

"Business——" he protested.

"Oh, bother business! I am not going to let you kill yourself."

A queer spasm seemed to pass through him; it was momentary, a mere shock of emotion, but she noticed it.

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"Promise," she said.

He promised.

It seemed more than probable to Hadfield that in the course of a week Fate would have declared herself, and that he would know whether her closed hand held disaster or good luck. If it proved to be disaster—well, nothing more would matter; he would have fought his fight and lost it. He would go away quietly to this cottage among the dunes, arrange his last elaborate deception, and then pass out into the night.

Fate did declare herself, and the very next morning. Hadfield received a telegram from one of Thomas Vincit's nephews, announcing his uncle's death.

"Uncle passed away last night. Funeral at 2.30 on Thursday.—VINCIT."

Hadfield was talking to Cameron when the telegram arrived, and he read it, laid it aside, and went on talking, yet he was conscious of a queer sense of unreality, of having suddenly passed over to some other life. It was as though the spirit of him had left his body. He heard himself talking, saying things that now seemed trivial and almost absurd. So might a man slain in action pause to look at the dead part of himself and remember his violent and fierce moments of a moment ago.

"Mr. Vincit is dead," he heard himself saying to Cameron; "the funeral is on Thursday, but I shall not go."

"We shall act for his beneficiaries—I suppose?" said the Scot.

"I expect so. His estate goes to his two nephews. He had no other relatives. I must get out his will and look through it."

When Cameron left him he sat in his chair, staring at the opposite wall, quite still and absorbed in thought. Suddenly he smiled. What an ironical thing life was, that a man should be broken and shamed after years of self-denial and stubborn labour, for the lack of ten thousand pounds! The sum was so impossibly great and impossibly small, a fortune to some, a mere card debt to others.

He asked himself what he was going to do.

Take up his available capital, and try a last gamble with it, buy a mass of rotten speculative shares and play for a rise? No, that was a mug's game, and he would not play it. He might go to his bank and negotiate a loan, but they would ask for securities, and whose securities could he give? Securi-

ties that were not his? No, he had no intention of repeating Lambourne's experiment. There were money-lenders by the score, but he was shy of such people. He had no desire to pull his head from under a guillotine to put it in a noose.

There was no one to whom he could appeal.

No one?

He thought of Rosamund Lambourne, and told himself that he could not go to her. He had fought his fight for her sake, and he had lost it. He was a prisoner to fate, and he was not going to ask the woman he loved to ransom him, and with her all.

Presently he locked his desk, rose, stood for a moment looking at her picture, and then took his hat and went out. In passing Cameron's room he opened the door and threw him a few words.

"I am going out for a while. I shall be back this afternoon."

He went out into the city streets. The people were like shadows, hurrying, absurdly serious shadows. Or rather, they were solid, fleshly, material creatures preoccupied with material things, and he was the shadow. He found his way into one of the old city churches and sat there in the cool and quiet gloom, giving himself to strange reveries. He seemed to have lost consciousness of time and space, for time and space are but part of our dream.

It was late in the afternoon when Hadfield returned to his office. He had had no lunch, nor did he feel the lack of it, for the physical part of him was completely dominated by the spiritual, and his brain had cleared like a clouded sky. He knew now what he had to do, and he set about the doing of it.

He rang his bell for a clerk.

"Will you ask Mr. Cameron to give me five minutes?"

Cameron came to him, and that he saw nothing strange in Hadfield was a proof of the older man's serene fatalism.

"Cameron, I am going to take a fortnight's holiday. I shall go away early next week. Do you think you can manage?"

"Of course I can. I am glad you are taking a holiday. Why not make it a month?"

"Perhaps I will. I am rather tired. I am taking a furnished cottage on the French coast—just the sea, and the sky and the sands, you know."

"I should make it a month," said the Scot.

Hadfield was troubled about Cameron, for he respected the man and liked him, but Cameron would not be involved in the crash—in fact, he would be freed by it. He would be able to collect his own circle of elients, and join another firm, or begin life on his own, but Hadfield was hurt by the thought that this man who had been so loyal to him would be compelled to believe him a defaulter. He had thought of writing a private and confidential letter to Cameron, but he realized the unthoroughness of such a confession. If he was to carry on the illusion to the end it was better that no living soul should know that it was an illusion.

When Cameron left him he wrote a letter to Rosamund Lambourne.

"I have decided to take advantage of your suggestion, and I will take the cottage at Mayeux. If you will let me have your friend's name and address I will pay her the month's rent in advance. I suppose she will be able to supply me with a little information as to the old French madame. A lone man is so helpless!

"Will you dine with me on the Monday? I hope to take the Newhaven-Dieppe boat on the Tuesday morning."

Mrs. Lambourne was puzzled by this letter, not by what it said, but by what it did not say, for it was the most formal letter that she had ever received from Hadfield, and she had a suspicion that it was intended to convey nothing. But why? She found it challenging all manner of conjectures, and troubling her with vague questions. That this letter should have been so different from all the other letters he had written her was sufficient to provoke the tender curiosity of a woman.

It was by chance that she happened to see in *The Times* the announcement of old Thomas Vincit's death. The name was familiar to her, so tragically familiar, linked up as it was with the memories of that night at Marley, that it suggested some instant danger. She connected Hadfield's formalism with it, his sudden decision to go away. She had his tired and worried face constantly before her eyes.

"My dear," she thought, "has fate struck you a fatal blow after all these brave years. Are you going away to do what he did? And never a word to me! But that would be like you."

She replied at once to his letter, and echoed his tone of casual calmness.

"I will see Norah Robins to-night. You can leave the details to me. I

will get her to write to Mayeux, and have the cottage prepared for you by Madame Brugnou.

"I am glad you have decided to take the holiday, for you need it.

"I will be at our little place on Monday at the usual time. Till then, au revoir."

She went first to one of Thomas Cook's offices, and bought a first-class ticket to Dieppe. From Cook's she hastened to Mr. Walsh's, and surprised him with her instructions.

"I want you to withdraw all my War Bonds from the Safe Deposit Co., and I want you to alter my will."

He looked at her questioningly.

"Marietta has not suffered a reverse?"

"No, no, we are more flourishing than ever; but I think of buying a partnership in a certain concern. If the venture materializes I will tell you about it later."

"You require the whole ten thousand pounds? I believe that is the sum."

"Yes."

She nodded at him.

"Please do not look so alarmed. I have not taken to gambling. I shall be glad if you will have the bonds sent to me at my flat by special messenger on the Monday morning."

"My dear lady, it shall be done. And now, about your will?"

His eyes were slightly ironical and amused, but her calmly serious face impressed him.

"I wish everything that I possess to be left to James Hadfield, Esq., of Messrs. Lambourne and Hadfield, and of 77, George Street."

"Everything?"

"Yes. In the event of my death——"

"My dear lady?" he exclaimed.

She gave a little, half-exultant laugh.

"Oh, I am only taking precautions. I never felt better in my life."

On the morning of the same day James Hadfield had a visitor, the elder of Thomas Vincit's nephews, a prematurely fat man of forty of the aggressive, round-headed type. Out of breath when he reached the firm's doorway on the third floor, he pushed in, breathing hard and snuffling like a pig. His visit was a visit of aggression. He had come to conclude an uncomfortable piece of business, and he had no idea of making it less uncomfortable by carrying it through gracefully, being the vulgar sort of man who believes a loud voice and a loud manner to be impressive and final.

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He was confronted by Sandys sitting at his desk.

"Mr. Hadfield in?"

"Yes. Have you an appointment, sir?"

"No. You go and tell him that Mr. Claude Vincit is here, and that he is in a hurry."

Sandys gave him an ex-sergeant-major's look.

"I will inquire whether Mr. Hadfield can see you. Take a seat."

Hadfield smiled a rather tired and cynical smile when he heard Mr. Claude Vincit's name. He had expected some such irruption, and he was not unprepared for it.

"I will see Mr. Vincit in twenty minutes, Sandys."

"Very good, sir."

So Mr. Claude Vincit sat on a chair in the vestibule for twenty minutes, growing hotter and more aggressive under Sandys's hostile eyes—eyes which said very plainly: "I made a mistake in calling you 'sir.' I know a sahib when I see one, and you never will be one. Put that in your pipe, my fat lad, and smoke it." Mr. Vincit twirled his hat, kept pulling at his watch, and read all the bills advertising various forthcoming sales of real estate. Once, tall Cameron the Scot came out of his room, looked at Mr. Vincit, and went in again as though the thing displeased him.

"Here, I can't hang about all day."

Mr. Vincit got up on his thick legs.

"You go and tell Mr. Hadfield that my business is important. D'you understand—important."

Sandys did not stir.

"Mr. Hadfield will ring when he is at liberty to see you."

And it was a very aggressive and bumptious man whom Hadfield interviewed at the end of half an hour.

"I'd like to tell you, Mr. Hadfield, that up in Nottingham I'm not used to being kept waiting. My time's valuable."

"And so is mine, Mr. Vincit. What can I do for you?"

"I've called for my uncle's securities."

"Indeed! You mean you wish to withdraw them?"

"I do."

Hadfield sat back in his chair.

"Certainly, Mr. Vincit. But we do not do things here at such express speed. Such securities as we hold shall be delivered to you in due course."

"I'd like them now."

"My dear sir," said Hadfield, very firmly, "you will not have them now. We do not transact our business in that way. Such securities as we hold shall be delivered to you and your brother when Mr. Vincit's will has been proved. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No; I may as well tell you that I am transferring my custom elsewhere."

"Just as you please, but there is a clause in your uncle's will making this firm responsible for dealing with his estate, and the clearing up of that estate. Now, if you will excuse me, I happen to be busy."

Mr. Vincit got up, a little deflated.

"I'll get my solicitor to write to you."

"Please do. Good morning."

The irruption of Mr. Claude Vincit was no more to Hadfield than the sound of a coarse voice heard for a moment in a crowded street, for he was beyond being wounded by such human blatantries. His consciousness had withdrawn itself to dwell upon a man's most sacred thoughts, and so absorbed was he in this last inward act of self renunciation that his senses were blunted against the impressions of the outer world.

He thought continually of his last meeting with Rosamund Lambourne, and the contemplation of it always left him a little incredulous, as though he could not convince himself that it would be their last meeting.

At five o'clock on the day before his departure for Mayeux he was sitting on the edge of his bed at 77, George Street, staring at an open suit-case which he had been packing. He had packed methodically, like a man who had unlimited time and no cares, nor had he allowed himself to be obsessed by the thought that he would never re-pack that case. He refused to be emotional. He had taken from a drawer the revolver he had salvaged from Marley, the very revolver with which Lambourne had shot himself, and he had calmly tucked it away under a neatly folded coat. He had compelled himself to be cool and practical.

But as he sat on the edge of his bed he realized that in two hours or so he would be facing Lambourne's wife across a corner table in that little Soho restaurant. The thought shocked him—the thought that after to-night he would never see her again. And perhaps for the first time in his life he was conscious of fear.

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A DINNER, AND THE SANDS OF MATEUX

HADFIELD was waiting for her at the table that had always been theirs on the nights when they had dined together. She was a little late, and as she came towards him between the tables, Nanine their waitress, who had developed a sentimental interest in these two, ran forward to take her cloak.

"*Tien, mais madame est tres—tres jolie ce soir!*"

"Perhaps because I am happy, Nanine."

"Then monsieur will be happy—also."

Hadfield had risen. His face looked rather pale and worn as he watched the two women.

"I am late," she said; "do not scold me."

He was conscious of a sudden tremor of surprise, for she seemed to him to be different, though what the difference was he could not say. She had a more vivid look. There was mystery about her, a suggestion of some indefinable and deep tenderness which played like light with the texture of her beauty. She appeared more rich, more comely, more youthful and yet more mature, vital with happiness—a happiness which trembled and glimmered between laughter and tears. His sense of her dearness was overwhelming. He stood there like a dumb creature, looking at her, unable to speak.

"What weather!" she said; "you will have a perfect crossing."

She sat down. It seemed to him that every movement she made had a happy and exultant grace, that she was like music full of some significant yet untranslatable appeal, a sequence of sweet sounds which filled the heart with vague yearnings. He tried to think of something to say to her. He was obsessed, stricken by the thought that this was their last evening together.

"Just like the war," he said, and spoke the words aloud, "and one's last night on leave."

She gave him a meaning look, and picked up the wine list. "Surely not! What a way to approach a holiday! Now, what shall we drink to-night? I will supply the wine, and you shall supply the dinner."

But he would not have that.

"This is my evening, the whole of it, but you shall choose the wine."

"Thank you," she said; "do you know, I always have a secret love for Beau-

jolais. It is full of the aroma of many memories."

He looked at her searchingly; it was his favourite red wine, and they had so often drunk it together.

"That is for my benefit?"

"Is it?"

She pulled off her gloves, and her eyes were hidden.

"Well, perhaps, perhaps not! If we love the same things, so much the better."

He sat and stared at her; he opened his mouth to say something, and smothered that something before it was said; she was aware of his emotion, though she seemed intent upon her gloves. She saw him open the wine list, though there was no need for him to open it; his hands were trembling.

"Well, let it be Beaujolais."

He glanced up for the wine-waiter, and she saw a kind of anguished radiance on his face.

"Just like your last night's leave!" she thought. "Ah, you betrayed yourself there. But you will not tell me, and I shall not ask you yet."

He was ordering the wine, and his voice was not quite under control. She opened her vanity bag, took out a mirror, looked at herself in it, put it away again, and then glanced at him with a gleam of tender mischief.

"How do you like it?"

She saw that he was lost for the moment.

"My hat?"

"Oh—your hat! Another new one! Your hats grow on your head like flowers."

"But when I begin to fade?"

"I don't think you will ever fade," he said.

"Dear man, do you know that I am thirty-five?"

"What a preposterous age!" he retorted, catching her spirit.

"It is a very serious age. At thirty-five a woman begins to think."

"What does she think about?" he asked her.

"Oh, a thousand things—how unpleasant it is to have to associate with common people, how life seems to grow noisier and more blatant, how one begins to long at times for some gentle place far away in the country where you do not see the ordinary evil man, and young women with painted faces, and hear common children shrieking. Oh, this poor cheap world of to-day! I pity it, and yet I cannot love it, and I ought to love it."

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"Why?" he asked her.

"Because it is so humdrum and foolish and stupid; because it is so full of poor, crude souls. But I want to get away into the deeps and dream."

His face was very sad—sadder than he knew.

"Yes, a living sleep, far away, the great peace. But why not take a cottage somewhere?"

"And bury myself? And without a comrade? No. But how serious we are, and you about to start on your holiday; it cannot be allowed. Let us drink the health of your holiday."

She raised her glass, and, touching his glass with hers, looked straight into his eyes.

"To the holiday you have earned."

She saw that he hardly touched the wine, and from that moment he could not rally to her; but he seemed to sink into a long and tender contemplation of her, a mood that listened as though she were music. Sometimes he smiled faintly. It was she who talked and he who listened, and so the evening passed away.

She chose to walk home, and he walked with her, and she was aware of his face as of something luminous and silent and infinitely sad. She could guess what his thoughts were, and when she spoke to him her voice was very soft.

"Will you come in for a little while?"

But the nearness of her had become unbearable, and the sense of loss in him an acute pain. He wanted to escape, for he felt that he would blurt out words of self-betrayal, and the courage in him was growing thin.

"No, not to-night, Rose. Good-bye."

She gave him her hand, and he held it for a moment.

"Good-bye—for to-night," she said.

He was inarticulate with all the things he might have said, and he left her hurriedly, like a man taking flight from his own soul.

77 George Street seemed very familiar and dim and murky when he returned to it, and as he climbed the stairs to his room he noticed the cracked globes of the gas brackets and the jets turned low to save the gas. This saving of light struck him as being ridiculous, and he turned on the jet outside his room full glare. There was a hole in the stair carpet here, and he could remember catching his foot in it. The faint, stale smell of the basement kitchen floated up from below.

"Good lord!" he thought. "After all,

one is better out of it! I think I should regret nothing if only she knew the truth."

He locked his door, and sitting down on the bed, stared reflectively at his suit-case. How unsympathetic and yet how challenging inanimate things were! He looked at his watch. Three hours ago he had been sitting in exactly the same place, staring at the open suit-case and the neatly folded coat which hid Lambourne's revolver. Had he really dined with Rosamund Lambourne, and dined with her for the last time? How utterly preposterous it all seemed, this silly world full of absurd illusions; and surely he was the most preposterous creature in it. What had he gained by years of self-renunciation, and by a quixotic silence which persisted in being silent to the end? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! He had created his own illusion and it was killing him, and no one cared. And why the devil should they care? We are not worth the price of a telegram to most of our neighbours, and the only people who would show any feeling would be the people to whom he owed money.

He felt bitter, savage.

"Damn! Why does a man do it?"

He began to undress, and as he stood in front of the mirror and unfastened his collar and tie he looked at himself with a kind of mocking curiosity.

"In three days or so you will be dead. How does that strike you, my friend?"

It struck him as being absurd.

"Idiot! You do not know how to use a dramatic opportunity. Now, if you had been convincingly shrewd, the strong man, you would have told her the truth to-night, and something wonderful might have happened. At least, you would have gone out with dignity, a romantic figure. Romance! There is no such thing as romance. It is the way you happen to look at life when your liver is working well and you have plenty of money in your pockets. Why on earth are you doing this?"

He pulled off his shirt.

"Just to be thorough. To pat yourself on the back and say, 'You did the thing thoroughly.' And she will never know that you were anything but a seedy scamp. Well, after all, you are about the damndest fool—"

He unlaced his boots and kicked them off.

"If I want to be a damned fool I can be one, can't I?" he said aloud, addressing the wardrobe, and the wardrobe made no reply; but the occupant of the

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room below him turned over testily in his bed and then reflected that it really was the first time that the man upstairs had come home drunk.

Next morning he caught the boat train to Newhaven, and as he walked restlessly up and down the platform he was conscious of the fact that he was watching for someone—for her. It was possible that a whim might send her down to see him off; but she did not appear, and he climbed into his compartment and sat there with closed eyes. His senses were abnormally alert, and he found himself acutely sensitive to noise, the silly, needless noise made by obtuse and insensitive people. A porter came along and banged the door, and Hadfield started in his corner, fiercely resentful. A sudden anger flared in him.

"What a world of fools!"

The train started, and he lay back with closed eyes and was soothed by the rattle of the wheels, for the sound was inevitable and rhythmical, and he did not resent this sound of motion. There were two other people in his compartment, but he was hardly aware of them. One of them was a woman with a sucked-in lower lip, a sharp nose, and eyes that were hard behind rimless pince-nez. She watched Hadfield nearly all the time with a catlike and unblinking stare, and once he opened his eyes and met hers. A flash of instinctive hostility passed between them.

"You are not ill, are you?" asked the woman.

"Not in the least, madam."

"Well, I thought you looked ill. So inconsiderate of people to travel when they are sickening for something. And I am just starting on my holiday."

"So am I," he told her, and she appeared satisfied and ceased to observe him with her hard eyes.

On the boat he carried his suit-case and bag as far forward as possible and made himself a little solitude away from the crowd. It was a hot and windless August day, without a cloud in the sky, and the sea like powdered lapis-lazuli and flat as glass. As they steamed out he sat and watched the houses of Seaford and the white cliffs beyond it disappear into the heat haze, telling himself that England had passed out of the little that remained to him of life. He sat and smoked, and felt the sea, its largeness, its impersonal indifference. Like the noise of the train, it soothed him. He began to be less intimately angry with himself, more in touch with the inevitable drift of things. The sun

made him feel a little sleepy, and when the French coast rose out of the grey-ness he accepted it and all that it implied. He saw a sea front, a pier, hotels, bathers, grey-green hills, chalk cliffs, the great crucifix on the jetty. He looked at it as a tired and sleepy man looks at a panorama in which he has no vital and conscious interest.

Half an hour later he sat in the buffet drinking soup while he waited for the train that would take him to Mayeux. In due course it took him to Mayeux. Looking out of the window, he was aware of the flat fields, and poplars all leaning in one direction, of a line of sandhills pale yellow against the blue of the sky, of belts of dark green pine. He got out at the little station with his suit-case and his bag, and asked the way to the Villa Tamarisc.

His French was execrable, but the Mayeux railway porter was able to disentangle some meaning from it.

"The Villa Tamarisc? Two kilometres. Take the road that crosses the line, go past a farm, and you will see the house—a white house close to the sea. No, monsieur, there is no one here to carry luggage."

So Hadfield picked up his suit-case and bag and started on his solitary walk to the cottage. Mayeux lay behind him, a little cluster of houses round the slate blue spire of a church, and as he went forward towards the dunes and the sea he seemed to wade deeper and deeper into an all-prevailing solitude, a solitude that was infinitely restful. "At last," he thought, "I shall not be stared at by anybody. I shall hear nothing but the sea and the wind in the dry grass and the pines, and no one will ask me silly questions." He felt the solitude like a soft sea breeze playing upon his heart, and he was not troubled by the weight of his suit-case and bag. He hurried to pass the farm, a square of white-walled, red-tiled buildings, seeing it as the last human question mark between him and the great silence. He walked fast. He saw no one, only two cows grazing at large over a waste of gorse and grass; and over yonder lay the sand dunes and the sea.

When Hadfield was a hundred yards past the farm he had his first sight of the cottage. It was long and low and white, with one black chimney, and he noticed that smoke was rising from the chimney, a flag warning him of Madame Brugnion's presence. He understood that she came from the farm which he had just passed, and he reflected that

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he could persuade her to return to the farm and not take her duties too seriously. The distant white cottage pleased him, though he neither analysed nor questioned his sense of pleasure. The Villa Tamarisc stood back from the dunes, with a wood of pines to the east of it, and as Hadfield drew nearer he saw that the front windows of the cottage looked towards a broad gap in the sand hills, and beyond the gap flashed the sea. It occurred to him that he would be able to see the sun go down and quench itself in the blue gloom of the deep waters.

The garden, a tiny patch of ground in front of the cottage, was surrounded by a tamarisk hedge.

"*Bon soir, monsieur. Monsieur est arrive.*"

The voice came over the tamarisk hedge, and Hadfield found himself looking into the swarthy face of the French woman. She was old and she was ugly; she had black moles on her face; and a moustache, and yet there was something likeable about her, a flicker of humour, an irrepressible good nature.

"Madame Brugnion?"

"Yes, monsieur. I have everything ready. Will monsieur come and see?"

Hadfield carried his luggage into the cottage, vividly reminded of those days when he had inspected many French billets and always his first care had been the bed. He saw that the cottage was very simply furnished and very clean. In the sitting-room the table was laid for dinner—the smoking chimney had suggested the preparation of a meal. Madame Brugnion was punctiliously thorough. She insisted on his visiting the two bedrooms.

"Everything is clean, monsieur."

There were two bedrooms, and Hadfield noticed that the bed in each had been made up. He was puzzled. Surely Madame Brugnion did not contemplate making her post a residential one? Rather awkwardly and in stumbling French he commented on the preparation of those two beds.

"Madame, I shall not require both!"

She laughed and gave him a queer look.

"Of course not; but I thought monsieur might like to make his choice."

He managed to answer her smile, and from the bedrooms he was led about the cottage, to be shown the kitchen arrangements and where the lamps and the coal were kept.

"Monsieur will wash in the sea, no doubt?"

He nodded.

"I shall have a little dinner ready for monsieur in half an hour. Perhaps he will unpack his luggage or go for a walk on the sands. When I have served monsieur's dinner I must return and take care of my husband."

"You live at the farm?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have lived there all my life."

"You need not trouble to come back to-night, Madame Brugnion. I can look after myself till the morning."

"As monsieur pleases."

He went out, and after loitering a moment in the garden, where the tamarisk flamed pink in the evening sunlight, he strolled across the sands towards the sea. A strange tranquillity descended upon him. He was but vaguely conscious of the scene before him, the pale gold of its dunes, its silver green grass tussocks, its groves of solemn pines, its blue and peaceful sea. He noticed no details, nor did it occur to him for a moment that he was not alone here, that the solitude contained another presence, a presence other than Madame Brugnion's. He passed down between the dunes and reached the beach, where tiny waves made a moist murmur along the sands. The solitude seemed complete. He sat down close to the water's edge and watched the gentle flux and reflux of the sea. Looking out over it, he felt that he was on the very edge of the great beyond, close to the eternal sleep, the bourn of tired souls.

"I will come out here after dinner," he thought, "and watch the sun go down. I have the whole night before me."

He walked back to the cottage over the soft sand, making a detour round one of the many dunes and approaching the cottage from the direction of the farm. Madame Brugnion was standing behind the tamarisk hedge, and as she was slightly deaf and the sand muffled his footsteps, he surprised her there, her two hands parting the tamarisk tops and her face set intently towards the group of pines on the neighbouring hillock.

"Oh, la, la, monsieur! You startled me."

Her agitation was unaccountable to Hadfield. He concluded that she was highly strung, for all her swarthyness and her solid breadth of face.

"Pardon me, madame."

"Monsieur, I was looking for you. Dinner is served."

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She did not re-enter the cottage, but left Hadfield to help himself, and in five minutes he had forgotten all about her, for though she was the last human figure he expected to see in this world, she cast no shadow across his mind. He found that he was hungry, and he ate a sound meal, telling himself with great reasonableness that a hungry body was no help to a man who was setting out on that last journey. Moreover, he had much to do, many letters to write, the last fragments of the illusion to lay in order. The sunlight shone in and touched the white table-cloth and the polished pinewood floor. It struck him that the cottage was very clean and wholesome, and that it had the feeling of a place that had been lived in by pleasant people.

"I'll make that all right," he thought. "I'll leave no stains here. The sea is big and clean enough for a man to die in."

His thoughts began to centre upon his death. He was aware of a sense of its inevitableness, and yet he could not realize death as a personal and imminent fact. He was rather vague about it. It had not begun to frighten him, nor did he think that he would begin to be frightened by it. He had gone too far; he had cut the one human cord that might have vibrated and set up a tremor of inward anguish. He was not going to let himself think about Rosamund Lambourne. Surely a man's death could be a business proposition, calmly conceived and calmly carried out.

When Hadfield had finished his meal he cleared the table, lit a pipe, and went out into the garden. The sun was hanging low over the sea, the tamarisk flamed still more redly, the hollows among the dunes were filling with darkness, and the pine woods threw long shadows. He saw a track of gold upon the water leading in one long shimmer to the setting sun, and it seemed to him a track along which his thoughts might travel. He would be quite alone down there, and he felt a desire in him for the last sunset, the last dusk, while he listened to those little sliding waves. When night came—well, he would light the lamp for an hour and then return to the sea and the night.

Going down from the cottage Hadfield climbed one of the dunes nearest to the sea and sat down in the coarse grass. If ever a man had the right to assure himself that he was the one solitary figure in that little world of sandhills and of waves it was he.

"I have come to the world's end," he thought. "I am quite alone."

His glance went northwards over a sea that was darkening to the colour of amethyst and touched an imaginary England. His imagination went beyond the white cliffs and the fields, beyond the outer ugliness of the suburbs, into the very heart of the life which he had left. Just twenty-four hours ago he and she had been sitting opposite each other in that Soho restaurant. Where was she now? What was she doing?

"I made up my mind not to be sentimental," he said to himself.

Suddenly, and in contrast to all that this solitude both assumed and suggested, he felt that he was not alone. The feeling was so abrupt and so vivid that he turned quickly as he sat and looked towards the Villa Tamarisc; nor did the fact that he could see no one satisfy him. He stood up, and from the vantage of the dune's top scanned the beach, the rolling sandhills, the fields towards the farm. No human thing was visible, and yet that feeling remained.

He made an attempt to ignore it. He sat down again and tried to fix his thoughts on all that he had to do. There was a letter to Cameron, that letter to her.

But should he write to her? Would not such a letter be superfluous when he had made up his mind that even that last letter should not tell her the truth?

But why should he not tell her the truth? Surely it could not hurt her now? She would not think it necessary to do some quixotic thing—offer her own private money to old Tom Vincit's yapping nephews. But it was possible that she might make some such proud and sensitive gesture. No. He decided that he would not tell her.

And then it was that the thought of death began to hurt him. He watched the sun sink into the sea, and looking towards England, felt the dusk falling like rain upon all that space of waters. He was alone now. He had lost the sense of another human presence near to him, and in his loneliness he began to weaken.

"I must tell her," he thought. "I cannot go out without knowing that she will know."

VI

THE WOMAN INTERVENES

WHEN the dusk fell Hadfield became possessed by a great restlessness. His calmness deserted him, and coming down

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from the dune, he began to walk up and down the sands, and sometimes the little spreading waves touched his feet. The sun had disappeared below the horizon, and the sea, was growing dark under the paling sky.

His purpose had weakened, and so weak was it that he was tempted to procrastinate. "Why to-night? Why not to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow? Surely there is no hurry!" He stood and looked out over the sea, trying to persuade himself that the last act might be postponed; but the more he temporized the more intense became his faith in immediate action. "Will it be easier to-morrow?" he asked himself. "Once shirk a crisis and you will shirk it a second time. Didn't the war teach you that? Take your fear by the throat, or you will find it your master."

He overcame his irresolution; he stifled its cries and its excuses as he walked back towards the cottage. The afterglow had faded and the night seemed to come suddenly, flowing like water over the pale sands. A few stars glimmered. He was aware of the pine groves as a wreath of blackness against the sky, or as a cloud of smoke hanging above the sand dunes. A little breeze sprang up, and he heard it rustling in the coarse grass, making a sound that emphasized the greater silence of sea and sand. The cottage was a white smudge in the increasing darkness. He remembered looking towards the farm where Marie Brugnion lived, and wondering whether he could see its lights, as a lone man drifting at sea might look for the heartening glimmer of other lights. There was nothing. He knew himself to be alone.

This sense of his own loneliness, of utter isolation, threw him back upon his own courage. He walked steadily, stubbornly towards the cottage, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, willing himself to march straight upon the final objective. He was not aware of any other presence in the darkness about him, of any watchful and tender shadow following in the footsteps of his fate. His consciousness became more and more concentrated on this last act of renunciation. It was like a clenched fist, the knotted brow of a thinker.

He reached the tamarisk hedge and paused for a moment, head up, body rigid, for he fancied that he had heard some sound; and then he explained it by the night breeze playing in the tamarisk branches, as it had played in the dry grass among the dunes. He

went up the path and opened the door. The cottage was in darkness, and, being strange to it, he stumbled against a chair. He felt in his pocket for his matches and struck a light, but the draught from the door extinguished the flame. He closed the door, struck a second match, and went in search of a lamp.

Madame Brugnion had left the lamp ready on the kitchen table, and Hadfield lit it and carried it into the sitting-room. He had his back to the window of the room as he placed the lamp upon the table, and he did not see a face appear at the window and look in at him. It remained there for a few seconds, and then melted back into the darkness.

Strangely enough, Hadfield was conscious of a moment's uneasiness, and turning about, stood listening. He went to the front door, and he could hear nothing but the breathing of the wind in the tamarisk branches. As he reclosed the door and moved back into the room he noticed that the curtains were not drawn, and it occurred to him that he had better draw them. A moment later something within himself made him resist the impulse.

"You are getting jumpy," he thought to himself; "there is no one within a mile of this cottage."

He did not draw the curtains, and his restraint reinforced his feeling of self-mastery. Deliberately, and without haste, he set about doing what he had to do, and he began by clearing the table and bringing his suit-case in from the bedroom. From it he took a bundle of papers, his little private ledger, and Lambourne's revolver. Then he sat down, not facing the window, but with his back to it. He untied the piece of pink tape which fastened the roll of papers and sorted them out upon the table. He had brought note paper with him. He withdrew his fountain pen from his waistcoat pocket and laid it beside the ledger.

For a while he sat and meditated, his elbows on the table, his chin resting on his hands. He remained very still. He could hear his strap-watch ticking on his wrist. Presently he moved, picked up the pen, drew a sheet of paper to him, and began to write.

"DEAR ROSE—"

He got no farther, for all the mass of repressed emotion which was in him held like a stark and silently waiting crowd

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through which his thoughts were unable to push. He strove awhile with sentences which would not form themselves, and then laid the sheet aside and took a fresh one.

"DEAR CAMERON," he wrote. "I ask you, when you read this letter, to try and not blame me."

He succeeded better with that letter to Cameron, and he wrote on steadily, pausing now and again to think or to re-read what he had written; yet behind his intent and slightly stooping back the dark oblong of the window showed an oval patch of whiteness. Someone who had been hiding, pressed deep into the smother of the tamarisk hedge, had moved forward across the strip of sandy garden and now stood close to the window.

Suddenly Hadfield stood up. He had finished his letter to Cameron and was filling his pipe; but his matches were missing, and he remembered that he had left them in the kitchen. He was leaning forward, and his right hand had grasped the stem of the lamp, when he heard a knock on the cottage door, and for the moment he remained motionless, his hand still gripping the lamp. The sound had startled him quite extraordinarily. It was as though he had felt himself dead and someone had rapped on his coffin.

But action came quickly. His left hand went out, picked up the revolver, dropped it into the suit-case and closed the lid.

"I suppose it is the Frenchwoman," he thought.

He moved to the door, but he made no attempt to open it.

"Who's there?"

There was no answer, but the knock was repeated, quite a gentle knock, suggestive of mystery, of some intimate inward meaning. Hadfield felt himself trembling. The sound was so human; it set up strange vibrations in him; and yet he never suspected.

He opened the door and saw her.

She smiled up at him from under the brim of one of Marietta's hats. She had a light travelling bag in her hand, and as he stood there staring at her in voiceless astonishment she held it out to him.

"I am so tired of carrying this."

He took it from her, but he still stood in the doorway, blocking her way. The unexpectedness of her coming had overwhelmed him, and he had not yet

emerged from the deeps of his amazement.

"Where on earth have you dropped from?"

"The farm—Madame Brugnion's farm. But, dear man, am I to be kept on the doorstep?"

He stood back and let her in, and, closing the door after her, remained there, her bag in his hand, his eyes questioning her every movement. She stood by the table, unpinning her hat. And then he became aware of her bag of which his right hand was gripping the handle, and he was assailed by the bag's suggestiveness and all that it implied. It occurred to him to wonder what the time was, and a glance at his wrist-watch told him that it was five minutes past ten.

"You came from the farm! But how?"

She laid her hat on the table, and her glance passed over the mass of papers.

"You had man," she said.

He did not answer.

"I had a suspicion that you would bring your work with you, and that you would not take a proper holiday."

"Oh—that's nothing!" he said.

"You call it nothing. You have been reading legal documents and writing letters! Why—here is actually a piece of red tape! I am glad I came."

He made a sort of swaying movement, but his feet remained in the same spot.

"Why did you come?"

"To make sure that you took a real holiday. And I catch you on the very first night—up to your neck in work."

"Do you mean that you have come to stay here?"

"Yes."

"At the farm?"

"No, in the cottage. It holds two. Now, don't be scandalized!"

"I'm not scandalized," he said; "I'm——"

"Glad?"

She sat down, and her face was half averted. She had had one glimpse of him standing there, bewildered, grimly helpless, still holding that bag. She could understand how her coming had shocked him into helplessness. He did not know what to say or what to do. He was like a man who had lit the fuze of a bomb and was trying both to hide and to extinguish it. She was conscious of her rising emotion and of his.

"I had such a quiet crossing, Jim," she said.

The Other Man's Burden

"Were you on my boat?"

"No; I crossed last night."

"Last night!"

She felt him hold his breath, and for a moment she left him to struggle with his own conclusions.

"You crossed last night?"

"I did."

"But last night we were dining——"

"Well," she said, with a little upward tilt of the voice, "what of it? It did not prevent me catching the night boat."

"But I walked home with you."

"But you did not see me go to bed!"

He stared at the floor as though he were looking for something that he had lost.

"And I find all this clutter, dear man. I suppose that suit-case is full of more work?"

She stretched out a hand as though to raise the lid, and was instantly aware of his extreme and passionate agitation. She knew what was there as well as he did. He was trembling, tense yet trembling; he seemed unable to move.

She withdrew her hand and glanced at him.

"Jim, isn't it about time that you put down that bag?"

He reacted to the suggestion, and with such an awkward boyishness that she wanted to jump up and kiss him. He put the bag down on a chair, produced his unlit pipe, and remembering that he still had no matches, saw in the quest of a box of matches a chance to remove that suit-case.

"Excuse me a moment, Rose. I want a light."

"Why not use one of these wretched bits of paper?"

"Oh, I have matches in my room. This is no particular ornament either."

He picked up the suit-case and huddled it into his bedroom, and she heard him groping about in the darkness, and she smiled, but her smile was very tender.

"Jim," she called, "I think I have some matches in my bag."

He returned with worried abruptness, remembering that he had left that letter to Cameron lying upon the table, and he found her with her bag on her knees and in the act of opening it. She glanced up as he entered.

"No, this is not my only piece of luggage. I have left a trunk at the farm; they are sending it down in the morning."

She bent her head again over her bag.

"Here we are. Now, smoke hard."

She handed him the matches.

"You have not asked me, Jim, if I have had any dinner."

"Have you?"

"Yes, Madame Brugnon arranged that; she is an excellent cook; I think we ought to be very comfortable here for a month."

Hadfield had struck a match, and his eyes looked at her over the top of the little flame. Almost she could hear him exclaiming: "A month! Good Lord!" Next moment he was lighting his pipe. He threw the match into the stove and sat down.

"Did Madame Brugnon know you were coming?"

"Of course."

"That explains it," he said, but he would not tell her what it explained.

Meanwhile she was feeling for something in her bag, and Hadfield watched her hands with an air of helplessness.

"Since you seem to be such an inevitable lawyer, Jim," she said, "and the table is littered with all this stuff, I may as well add to it. Here we are."

He saw her bring out a fat, fawn-coloured envelope; the flap of it had once been sealed, but the seal was broken. She held the envelope out to him.

"Will you check these bonds for me?"

He looked at her questioningly.

"I said—check them. I want to see that the amount is correct."

Still he did not extend a hand.

"Dear man," she said, "I think you must have some form of paralysis; either you cannot hold things or cannot let them go. Please do as I ask you."

He took the envelope, withdrew the contents, and spread them on the table, a great wad of War Bonds, and his eyes betrayed his surprise.

"What's all this? You don't mean to say that you have been walking about with these in your bag?"

"Oh, I kept a pretty tight hold on the bag. Profits, Jim, three years' profits on my business."

"Your business?"

"Yes. There should be ten thousand pounds."

His pipe had gone out, and he laid it on the table. His eyes seemed to have deepened; his forehead showed great lines.

"Your business!" he repeated.

She put the bag on the floor, drew the chair in, and rested her elbows on the table.

(Continued on page 271)

By Warwick Deeping

"I suppose I have a confession to make. Have you ever heard, Jim, of Marietta's?"

"Marietta's?"

"The hat shop—perhaps the most famous hat shop in London."

Their eyes were level, and fixed intently upon each other.

"Yes. Even I have heard of Marietta's. You could not very well miss Marietta's, could you? Why, I remember catching you coming out of the shop."

"Well, I am Marietta," she said.

He just sat and looked at her, and his eyes said many things. They were very tired eyes now, and there was a sadness in them, an ironical sadness which hurt her almost as much as it was hurting him. For he was faced by the seeming mockery of her success, the absurdity of it, the ease with which she had made money by selling hats while he had failed at the last moment. And yet he had scraped together fifteen out of the thirty thousand pounds which Lambourne had lost, and he had done it with the sweat of his soul.

She, the woman, felt the edge on the bitterness of his silence.

"Yes, isn't it absurd," she said.

He sat back in his chair, looking at her hands.

"What made you do it? You had no need to do it."

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his face.

"Oh, yes, I had. A very desperate need. I had to help someone to pay a debt, at least—I wanted to help."

His glance lifted from her hands to her face.

"A debt? Whose debt?" he asked wonderingly.

"Peter's," she said, and bent her head.

The effect of that one word on him was dramatic, and yet he was the least dramatic of men. He sprang up and stood over her, and his face was a cloud of many emotions.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"You knew all the time?"

"Yes, all the time."

"But—how—did you come to know?"

Her head remained bowed.

"Jim, on that evening—I was in the garden, the loggia. The window was open, and I heard. At first I could not believe it. Then—I could not believe that a man could take up such a burden in silence and carry it. But you took it, and you carried it, and you have car-

ried it all these years. It was then that I began to believe."

The lamplight caught his face as he bent over her.

"Believe. In what?"

"In a man," she said softly.

There was silence for a moment. His face had an awed, inward look, but he did not move when she reached out across the table and picked up the sheaf of bonds.

"Jim—these are yours."

"Mine!"

"They belong to the firm of Lambourne and Hadfield. Take them."

Instantly she was aware of his resistance, and she had expected him to resist, for she had gone through this scene with him many times in her forward thoughts. She knew that for him there would be an element of humiliation in a woman's rush to rescue him, even though he loved that woman, and he would resist rescue. He had a very Victorian attitude towards certain problems; he was far less modern than she was.

"Rose, I can't take your money. It is quite impossible."

"Because a woman made it?" she asked him, with the gentlest of irony.

"No, not that. I hope I am not so narrow as that. There is another reason."

He went to the window, and, opening it, stood looking out into the darkness.

"May I know that reason?"

He was silent for a while, and she turned in her chair and leant her arms on the back of it.

"Jim," she said, "surely—you can tell—me."

"To tell you," he answered, "is harder than—"

"Oh, my dear," she said, "do you think that I cannot guess?"

He turned round and faced her.

"What have you guessed?"

"Only that my great day had come, my most dear opportunity. Jim, can you not understand that I have worked for it, and waited for it?"

His face was white and stubborn.

"I'm bankrupt," he said; "the firm can't meet its liabilities. I tried, but the time was too short."

"It was Mr. Vincit's death?"

"Yes."

"And what is the deficiency—now?" she asked.

He seemed about to speak, but no words came. His eyes were looking at those bonds lying upon the table, and the significant coincidence appeared to

The Other Man's Burden

paralyse his power of speech. The two sums were identical.

"I cannot tell you," he said presently.

"Does that mean that ten thousand pounds is not enough? I can wire for more to-morrow."

"I cannot tell you," he said, and turned again to the window.

She watched him for a moment. Then she saw a little tragic movement of his shoulders, and instantly her heart cried out in her. She rose and went to him, and thrust a hand under his arm.

"Jim, I know why you won't tell me."

He did not answer, for he was beyond answering her for the moment.

"I shall have to tell you," she said.

His head went down, and her fingers closed upon his arm.

"Jim, I am so lonely. Why won't you understand?"

She felt him trembling. She was conscious of a struggle within him, some tense inward effort, and then he turned to her, and looked down into her face.

"If I did not——" he began.

He saw her eyes fill with light.

"If you did not love me," she prompted, "and if I did not love you! Well, I do love you, dear. Doesn't that make everything seem absurdly simple?"

He spread his arms, blindly, gropingly, and next moment she had his head upon her shoulder.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "be happy, as I am happy. Be proud—as I am proud. I want you. Do you want me?"

"I have wanted you for years," he blurted; "it was for you that I tried——"

"I know," she said, with a hand on his head, "I know. The firm of Lambourne and Hadfield has made good. I am a rich woman, Jim, not because I have made a lot of silly money, but because——"

He raised his face and looked at her. "That? Dear God, how good life seems!"

"It is good."

And then he kissed her, and her smile was full of the exultation of new life.

"Jim," she said, "is there any reason why your sleeping partner should not carry on this other business a little longer? Say for a year or two? Then—Marietta can sell herself!"

For the first time that evening she saw him smile.

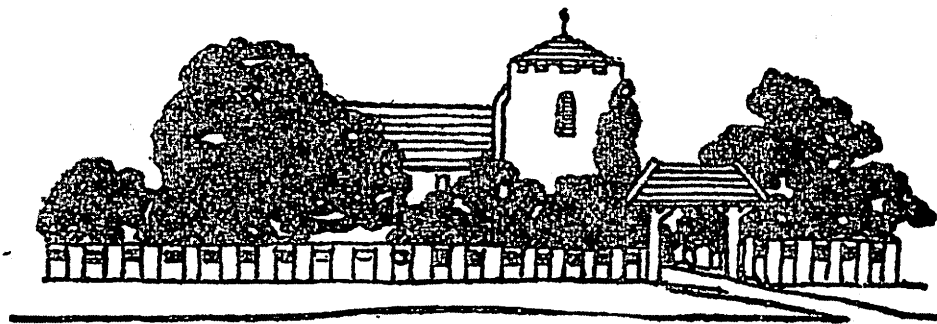
"No, under the circumstances, I consider——"

"That our holiday—our holiday—is going to be a real holiday. And rather happy?"

"Yes," he said.

And drawing her towards the door he opened it, and they went out together to where sea and sand and sky met.

WARWICK DEEPING.



Competition Corner

We again make an offer of two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the competitors who send in the titles of the four stories they like best in order of merit. The prizes will be awarded to those whose cards most nearly coincide with the voting of the majority of the competitors. Address, "Vote," THE STORY-TELLER, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4, and send in by November 3, 1922.

This month we have divided the two prizes, as the successful competitors sent in cards exactly the same. We have pleasure in awarding a prize of One and a Half Guineas to each of the following:

M. WILSON, 25 Aberdeen Place,
London, N.W.8.

Mr. W. R. MILLS, 28 Bessborough
Road, Harrow.

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THE REDEMPTION OF JOHN BENHAM.

BY
WARWICK DEERING.

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When John Benham looked the door of his cottage, and wandered out over the darkening moor with a loaded revolver in his pocket he was lost in one of those fogs of pessimism that blind a man with morbid emotion. The dog at his heels was the more sensible creature for the moment. The artist might have taken an example from the beast had he had the patience to reflect and to reconsider his mad whim. To be lonely in defeat is to tempt the mind to feed on its own fears. And John Benham was alone, and miserably poor. The valley lay before him, with its village, snuggled in the folds of twilight, with here and there a faint light shimmering. Humanity seemed very far distant from him. Night was descending. The clouds were darkening

in the black dress, his hands were grimed and bleeding with his work amid the wreckage. The dog Ben had stayed at the girl's side.

"They are taking you all to Harborough," he said.

"Yes."
"There is a hospital there. Can you bear being carried to the train?"

He was kneeling and looking into the white face lit by the light of the moon. She was quite young, refined, and comely to look upon—a pale, dark-eyed comeliness. Her pluck and patience were the things that impressed John Benham most. She was able to smile at him, yet in a forlorn and rather pathetic way.

"I think it is my left leg that is broken. What a lot of trouble I am giving you."

A couple of porters were passing with an empty stretcher. Benham hailed them; they carried the girl up the embankment to the waiting train.

There was a moment's delay before she could be lifted into the carriage. The artist sat down beside her, feeling that they had come strangely near to each other in this tragedy of the night.

"My name is Benham—John Benham," he said, with a touch of deprecating shyness in his voice.

She looked up at him steadily.

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was descending. The clouds were darkening in the western sky.

John Benham drifted down into the valley, caught himself in a thicket of Scotch firs on the hillside, and ran down listlessly under a tree.

"Dan, old dog—"

The rough-haired terrier had put his fore paws on his master's knee.

"Dan, old dog, how would you like to be a drysalter, eh? What is the use of living when people don't want us or our work?"

The dog whisked a stump of a tail, and answered the impeachment with a short sharp bark.

"Supposing I don't go home again, old man?"

Dan's brown eyes seemed to search the morose and spiritless face.

"You'll stay here and watch. No one will bother about me, and, after all, why should they? I'm no use to anyone in this world."

John Benham glanced round nervously into the dusk like a man who has stolen a purse and sneaked away to examine the spoil. Above him rose the deserted slopes of the moor, still touched with a vague glory of gold by the light from the fading west. The stillness of night had fallen on the valley. Far away the lights of the village glimmered; specks of green and red among the yellow marking the signal lamps of Wanford Station.

John Benham had pulled a revolver from his pocket. He balanced it in his hand, irresolutely, yet with a sentimental self-con-

she looked up at him steadily.

"I have to thank you for so much. My name is Willan—Rose Willan."

He nodded.

"They will take you to Harborough."

"Yes."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

She turned her face away uneasily for a moment.

"Could you send a telegram?"

"Of course."

"To my mother. Make light of it. I only left her to-day. I was travelling to Harborough. I am to be a governess there."

She gave him her mother's address, the name of some dull little road in a London suburb. John Benham repeated it several times to fix the words in his memory. He felt instinctively that this girl had had sorrow in her life of late. Possibly his own suffering had made him quick to detect the like expression in others.

They were coming to lift her into the train. John Benham felt for one of her hands.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye."

"I shall come to Harborough. And the hospital, may I call there—?"

"To see me?"

"Yes."

She gave him a quick glance as though the sympathy even of a stranger comforted her in her loneliness.

"I should be so glad—"

"Then—I will come."

The dawn was breaking when John Ben-

his pocket. He balanced it in his hand, irresolutely, yet with a sentimental self-consciousness, characteristic of the sensitive mortality of youth.

He remembered how he had once seen the body of a man who had died by his own hand. John Benham shuddered at the recollection.

He laid the revolver on the grass beside him, fondled the dog's head a while, and then began to unbutton his coat. Darkness gathered fast, and the spreading branches of the firs were black and motionless against the sky. The utter loneliness of the landscape intensified the morbid self-drama that enmeshed the artist's consciousness like the self-drama of a child.

The distant roar of a train rose from the deeps of the darkening land like the sound of the wind through a road at night. Far down the valley John Benham could see the headlights moving, coming and going as the sweep of woodlands screened the line. He sat watching the lights with a species of irresolute agony, his fingers fumbling at the buttons of his coat. The snake-like line of brightness lengthened out as the train started round the misty valley.

The shriek of a whistle, a sudden dull swelling roar, a sound like the grinding of great stones together, or the ransacking of trees under a weight of snow. A confused turmoil of light falling and rambling into the darkness beneath. The crackling of underwood, and the snapping of timber rising like a sharp burst of musketry from the dull undercurrent of war. The uproar of seconds; then, dark-

"Then—I will come."

The dawn was breaking when John Benham found himself again on Winton Road. Dan, tired and misty-eyed, followed meekly at his master's heels. They had passed the thicket of Scotch firs on their way, and John Benham had groped for the thing he had left on the grass, feeling greatly ashamed, and contemptuous towards himself.

The eastern sky was a sheet of gold as the artist unlocked the door of his cottage. Despite his night's work, he seemed to feel neither weariness nor hunger as he stood on the threshold and looked out over the misty moor. The divine freshness of a summer dawn breathed in the dewy air.

"I have been some use for once."

He spoke the words as though addressing the dog, who sat watching his master's face.

"I wonder whether she is really hurt."

This was a thought unspoken. And then—

"Cautious! It is the most black than I have. If she only knew what I was going to do last night."

It was a Tuesday when John Benham took the train to Harrogate, and turned in at the gate of the County Hospital. Rose Wilton was in one of the lower surgical wards, and the porter at the Ricketts gave John Benham the necessary direction. A long gallery with a swing door fitted with glass panels gave the artist a glimpse of some twenty beds with pink coverlets ranged rhythmically round the walls.

An elderly woman in a grey uniform met



This Handsome
COMPARE

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burst of musketry from the dull underchamber of war. The uproar of seconds; then, darkness, and silence, silence that seemed utter in contrast to what had passed.

John Benham was up like a sentinel caught sleeping at his post. The dog Dan was shivering, and giving frightened, restless whimpers. Vague noises were thrilling up out of the tremulous depths of the valley. In an instant this tragedy of larger issues had wiped the self-conscious egotism from the artist's mind.

We forget ourselves in action, and Joan Benham, plunging down the hillside, swinging, dodging, leaping the roots of trees, forgot the murderous toy that he had left lying under the Scotch firs. The dog Dan was racing at his heels. Together they crossed some sloping grassland, scrambled through a hanging wood, and came out into a field of corn.

A wavering and fitful glow given by the flames from some burning wreckage hung over the valley's trough. The embankment, a black wall, shut the scene in from the woods beyond. Two coaches were still clinging to the verge of the bank. Below, and some fifty yards in advance, a chaotic mass loomed up above the crushed feltwork of a hazel thicket. Volumes of white vapour rising above the foliage showed where the engine lay, half sunk in a chasm that it had torn in the soil.

Ears that have heard the cries of crushed humanity at such a moment are never likely to forget the sounds. John Benham,

walls.

An elderly woman in a grey uniform met John Benham at the door. It was raining day, and the artist was spared the undivided distinction of being stared at by twenty pairs of eyes.

"Is Miss Wilton here?"

The sister smiled.

"Can I see her?"

"Certainly. The bed in the rear corner."

He turned at a gesture of the sister's hand, and met the eyes of the girl whom he had taken up from the wreckage of the derailed train.

John Benham drew a chair beside the bed. They had shaken hands. A slight shyness, a sensitive reserve possessed them both for the first minutes.

"It was good of you to come."

"Not at all. Were you much hurt?"

He was looking at the face, white and spiritual below the black coils of her hair. It was a brave face, and yet the eyes were troubled. John Benham felt that he would like to hear her talk to him of herself.

"Your people have been here?" he asked.

"Yes, my mother."

"Is she staying in the town?"

"No: she has her living to earn; she is a widow."

John Benham nodded.

"There were seven of us when father died nine months ago. He was only a clerk, and left nothing. I spent four months looking for a post, and now—it is gone."

She spoke calmly without any tears in her

in the soil.

Ears that have heard the cries of crushed humanity at such a moment are never likely to forget the sounds. John Benham, breathless with running through the woodland and the wheat, felt his heart leap with a pang that was touched with fear. Dim figures were moving about the crushed chaff of the splintered coaches. The wreck would have been grim enough without the threatening tongueing of the flames.

A man in his shirt sleeves passed Benham, carrying a hurt child in his arms.

"How did it happen?"

"Good God, man, don't ask questions! Help to get the poor beggars out."

The last coach that had tumbled down the bank lay half tilted on its side. Its framework crumpled and distorted like a broken box. Benham's senses were bewildered for the moment. A figure passed him crawling through the corn. The wreck did not notice it. He was close to the wreckage before his eyes could discover details in the dusk.

The first thing that Benham saw was a white face overshadowed by the slanting body of the coach. A figure lay amid the crushed corn, half covered by the wreckage, a slight and delicate figure in a plain black dress. The arms were on his knees with the terror at his side. The whiteness of her face, and the expression of the widely open eyes alone betrayed that she was suffering.

"Are you much hurt?"

He bent over her, looking in her face.

"I can't move. My feet are caught——"

"Oh, Dan," the dog was licking her cheek;

nine months ago. He was only a clerk, and left nothing. I spent four months looking for a post, and now—it is gone."

She spoke quietly without any trace of bitterness or complaint. The world was no more garden of dreams for her, and yet she seemed unflinchingly courageous, and ready to face the realities of life.

"I thought you told me——" he began.

"That I was coming here as a governess."

"Yes."

"I was. But the people did not want me when they heard I should be a prisoner here two months."

"How catastrophically mean!"

"Oh, it was not their fault."

"Then, after two months?"

"I shall go home."

"And then?"

"And then? Begin all over again. I cannot," and she gave a tired sigh, despite her philosophy.

When John Benham discovered that he had talked to her for an hour that afternoon, he condemned the thoughtless mood that might have tried her patience.

"I am a selfish beast," he said as he rose to go.

"You have done me good. It helps one to talk over one's troubles."

He bent over her with a shy but manly reverence.

"Good-bye. May I come again?"

She coloured slightly as his eyes held hers.

"If you like."

"You won't mind? I mean—you will."

"Oh, Dan," the dog was licking her cheek.
"I must try and get you free from the
trouble."

He put his arms about her body, and tried
to draw her towards him from the broken
roadwork of the coach. A spasm of pain,
and a sharply drawn breath destroyed his
effort.

"I must get help. It is no use giving you
aid like this."

She rested her head against his shoulder,
and was silent a moment.

"You must not mind me. I am ready
now. I felt the woodwork give before."

"But I shall hurt you."
"I can bear it."

He looked at her anxiously, the vision of
his weaker self flashing vividly across his
mind.

"Stop me—if it is too much."
"Yes."

He drew her towards him again over the
corn, feeling her hands contract upon his
arms.

"Am I hurting you?"
"No, no, go on."

"Sure?"
"Yes."

She was setting her teeth and beating back
her impulses to cry out.

"Quick! It is going."
To John Benham the relief was as great as
to the girl when he felt her lying free, quiver-
ing a little, but breathing peacefully like one
in which some spasm of pain had ceased.

He lifted her in his arms, and laid her on
Lama Cracken at the edge of the cornfield.

"You wasn't mind? I mean—you wasn't
troubled me?"

"Oh nurse!"
And John Benham was reassured.
(The End.)

TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH CONCERT.

A very successful singing-room concert was held
in the Trinity Baptist Church Schoolroom, last
Wednesday evening in aid of the Church funds.
The room was very tastefully arranged. A pro-
gramme furnished by local talent had been care-
fully prepared, and each of the artists displayed
marked ability. Especially worthy of mention
however, was Miss M. Spencer in the rendering
of her song. The songs my mother used to sing,
which reached your hearts. At an early age she
sang "Sometimes in the twilight season." Mr. F.
Ingerson, who sang with great effect "A good
star of eve," was partly accompanied by Mr. A.
Swain on the cello, who also gave a splendid ren-
dering of a selected solo. There were good violin
soloists given by Mr. Edgar Williamson, which
were much appreciated. The harmonium solos
were in the very capable hands of Mr. Dave Mills,
who greatly added to the enjoyability of the even-
ing, and who wound up a really clever entertain-
ment with a song embodying the latest magazine
currents. The role of pianist was well filled by
Miss Ashton, and the glass of rose and song, the
National Anthem, and so brought to a close a suc-
cessful concert.

"A GOOD, SAFE, AND USEFUL MEDICINE."

"Clarke's Blood Mixture is entirely free from
any poison or metallic impregnation. Does not con-

"No, no, go on."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

She was setting her teeth and bearing back
or impulse to cry out.

"Quick! It is going."

To John Benham the relief was as great as
the girl when he felt her lying was, quivering
a little, but breathing peacefully like one
whose some spasm of pain had ceased.

He drew her in his arms, and laid her on
his back, at the edge of the cornfield.

"Go and help the rest," she said. "I
will be quite happy here."

He rolled up his coat and put it under her
head.

"I will come back presently."

The anesthetic agent at his hand was used
changed, up it went, into the human machine,
out of energy. The artist forgot the
inner part of himself in those grim hours of
bored by the light of the burning wreckage.

When John Benham returned to the girl

the man who would be a really good character
with a good embodying the latest scientific
principles. The role of the artist was well filled by
John Benham. At the close of the day and early the
National Anthem, and so brought to a close a great
show of music.

"A GOOD, SAFE AND USEFUL MEDICINE."

"Clarke's Blood Mixture is entirely free from
any poison or metallic impurities. Does not con-
tain any injurious ingredients, and is a good, safe
and useful medicine." — "Health."

Clarke's Blood Mixture is guaranteed to cleanse
the blood of all impurities from whatever source arising.
That's why it can be relied upon to effect a
lasting cure in all cases of Eczema, Scalded Skin,
Bad Legs, Abscesses, Ulcers, Pimples, Sores, and
Eruptions of all kinds. It cures Gonorrhea, Syphilis,
Blood Poison, Rheumatism, and Skin and Blood
Diseases of every description. It is sold at all
medicine stores. Over 50 years' success. 91 chemists and
doctors, 2s. 6d. per bottle. Ask for Clarke's Blood
Mixture, and see that you get it.

THE NEW MAGAZINE

The Tennis-Court

A Game in which a New Partner intervened and brought a Strange Result

By Warwick Deeping

IT was spring, and Dr. Jim rode up under the thorns and lilacs to Carberry Hill. On the right of the lane and spreading from a square-cut hedge lay a little meadow that was one sheet of gold, and in the centre of the meadow and surrounded by wire-netting—a tennis-court that had just been mown.

Dr. Jim pulled up his horse.

"That's queer," he thought, "it's the first time that court has been touched since the child died. Poor little Joy!"

"How she used to run! Light as a blown leaf, and old Carberry bobbing about like a boy! How he loved that child! Well, it is the second Mrs. Carberry, I suppose? A tennis-court is made to be used."

He turned in at the gate of Carberry Hill, and walked his horse up between the rhododendrons that were gorgeous with flower. How well he remembered old Edward Carberry buying the place, a wifeless man with a child, the child who had been christened Joy. Carberry had made a fortune somewhere in the Midlands, and the youth had come to him late in life—youth and a child. Dr. Jim did not like children, "egotistical little beasts," but he had liked Ted Carberry's Joy. The old man had done everything to spoil her, but she had been one of those creatures who did not spoil, even though a house, a garden, and an estate had been conceived as one delightful playground. The tennis-court had been made for her; so had the blue-bell dell, and the little lake with swans on it, the summer-house in the wood, the aviary full of birds. And then the child had died, and old Carberry had seemed to shrink up in his clothes.

Dr. Jim rode on, and by the white gate that led into the fruit garden he met Adam. The old gardener had a Dutch hoe in one brown fist and a basket of weeds in the other.

"Good-day to you, Adam."

"Day, sir."

"Good growing weather," said the doctor.

"It might be wus."

"How is Mr. Carberry after his holiday?"

Adam scratched his left ear with an earthy thumbnail.

"Much the same, sir, as he was before it. I ain't a believer in holidays."

"And Mrs. Carberry?"

Adam would have nothing to say about the second Mrs. Carberry before he had thrown an expressive and watchful glance over one shoulder.

"She worrits him," he observed; "she worrits everybody. That sort o' woman. Bustling about."

"I see the tennis-lawn has been mown."

Adam's eyes seemed to become mere slits in his solemn face.

"It has."

"Her orders?"

Adam nodded. The tip of his tongue came out and moistened that long and expressive upper lip, and somehow Dr. Jim understood that Adam hated the second Mrs. Carberry.

"I will say, sir, as I argued it with her. 'It ain't decent,' I said."

"And she?"

"She called I a silly ol' man."

Adam picked up his basket of weeds.

"It's a terrifyin' tidy house these days. Mornin', sir."

Dr. Jim rode on till he came to the formal garden in front of the windows of Carberry Hill, and there he had a full glimpse of the second Mrs. Carberry. A tall woman, flat as a board, with a straw

hat balanced on her tight little head, aproned, begloved, she was snip-snip-snip-ing with scissors at one of the viola beds. An aggressively busy woman, a practical woman, a woman with no lips and a hard and cheerful eye! Mrs. Carberry did not believe in giving way to things. Moods were the signs of an undisciplined soul.

But her twin soul, lately acquired and subjected to eugenic cheerfulness, was drifting about among the flower beds rather like a dog that is going blind. Dr. Jim sighted him as a helpless, vacant figure, purposeless as a blown leaf. The lady's energy was the wind that blew him about, a little thin figure that seemed to rustle as it moved.

"Edward, fetch me a basket."

She sent Edward indoors. She had purposely sent him indoors on discovering Dr. Jim. She came towards the man on the horse, her long shoes moving flatly over the grass, her black stockings in wrinkles about her ankles.

"Good morning, Doctor."

She smiled like a brightly frosted window, and Dr. Jim raised his hat.

"Good morning, Mrs. Carberry. I got your letter this morning. How is your husband?"

"Oh, much better, ever so much better. What he needs is taking out of himself."

She still had the scissors on her right thumb and forefinger, and she snipped them at Dr. Jim as though to emphasize her point.

"Taking out of himself. I wanted to have a word with you first, before you saw him. No, he did not expect you. Now, when I came to Carberry Hill I saw what the matter was at once, and how Edward had let himself grow flabby and sentimental. I thought to myself, Doctor, I must be firm, I must alter a lot of things, bury all sorts of things that ought to have been buried."

"So you had that tennis-lawn mown?"

"Exactly," said the lady, snipping with her scissors, "a man ought to be made to make an effort, you know."

Old Ted Carberry came out of the house with a basket, and Dr. Jim, dismounting, beckoned to the gardener's boy to come and hold his horse.

"I don't know whether I agree with your treatment," he said.

The second Mrs. Carberry smiled with complete cheerfulness.

"It's common sense," she said, "just common sense."

With the accent on the "common" thought the doctor, but he did not say so to the lady.

"Edward. Here is Dr. Jim."

"Well, Jim."

His eyes lit up. They shook hands.

"I hear you have had a splendid holiday," said the doctor.

"Oh, Louisa told you. I suppose it was a success."

"Success! Of course it was a success. Have you ever seen Edward looking better?"

The eyes of the two men met, and in the mind of each was the memory of a child.

"Don't lie," said the eyes of the old man.

And Dr. Jim did not lie.

Louisa Carberry left them alone together for half an hour. They sat on a seat under the oak tree, and Jim caught Carberry looking at two marks on one big bough, the marks left by Joy's swing ropes. The swing had been removed. Louisa Carberry's idea: "Take these rotten ropes away."

"Well, what did you do down South?"

Carberry's face had a curiously vacant, yet listening expression. It was as though he had lost something and was waiting for it to reappear.

"Do I don't remember doing anything?"

"Nothing at all?"

"Oh, yes, they tried to teach me to play bridge. But I couldn't remember. Such piffle, Jim, such piffle!"

The doctor looked at him with eyes of affection.

"You are too good to play bridge. I mean, you are too young."

"She likes it, you know."

"I dare say she does," said the doctor.

When Jim rose to go old Carberry drifted along with him, dog-like, eager to escape from the basket, the scissors, and the precise and proper flower beds. Carberry Hill had never been precise in the days of Joy, but a tumultuous and adventurous place where you followed the first impulse that came into your head. Dr. Jim looked at the little man who pattered along beside him between the banks of rhododendrons. Ted Carberry had grown still thinner since that disastrous and sensible second marriage.

Dr. Jim could see a figure in white.

"Why did you do it, man?"

He answered it himself:

"Of course, you were so damned."

They had reached the corner.

When old Carberry stopped.

He went grey; he

had a "heart," and Jim

that the old man had been

Then he remembered

"mown!" Carberry

the court? Why, of

Carberry looked

not to have done

THE TENNIS-COURT



Dr. Jim could see a figure in white running about the moonlit tennis-court and flourishing an imaginary racquet

"Why did you do it, man?" was Jim's thought.

He answered it himself:

"Of course, you were so damned lonely."

They had reached the corner of the meadow when old Carberry stopped with a little gasp. He went grey; his mouth seemed to fall in; his eyes stared. Carberry had a "heart," and Jim's thought was that the old man had been seized with "angina." Then he remembered the tennis-court.

"It's been mown!" Carberry's voice was a whisper.

"What, the court? Why, so it has. Did you not know?"

Old Carberry looked humiliated.

"They ought not to have done it with-

out asking me. You remember, Jim, the very week before that happened, she and I played tennis there."

"I remember it," said the doctor, "and she was like a bit of thistledown. I say, shall I walk back with you?"

Carberry's eyes showed a sudden obstinacy.

"No, I'll stay here. They might have put the net up. Adam shall do it."

Jim looked at him searchingly, and then mounted his horse and rode down the lane. The last glimpse he had of Ted Carberry was of an old man standing on the court and throwing up an imaginary ball and pretending to serve.

"Perhaps the woman was right!" he thought. "I wonder?"

About a week later Dr. Jim was called out to a case at Lambourne Parva. He cycled out with a black bag slung on the handle-bars, and it was midnight before he left the Lambourne cottage with another life begun under its black thatch. The night was very calm and still, with a full moon shining, and all the hedgerows and grassy spaces grey with dew. Dr. Jim took the lane that skirted Carberry Hill. He was tired and ready for bed, conscious of the moonlight as of nothing more than moonlight, and of the silence of the night as something very material and rather soothing.

Now when Dr. Jim heard that voice he was so sorely startled that he rode his bicycle into the hedge. The hedge belonged to the little meadow that held Joy Carberry's tennis-court, and Dr. Jim, extracting himself and his bicycle from the prickly wetness of the hedge, stood looking over it and wondering whether he had fallen asleep on the machine.

"Run, Joy, run! That shot's too good for you! Oh, well played, well played!"

Dr. Jim uttered one of those inward exclamations that do not reach the lips, for the voice was the voice of Edward Carberry, and Dr. Jim could see a figure in white running about the moonlit tennis-court and flourishing an imaginary racquet.

"Good God!" said Dr. Jim.

He leant his bicycle against the hedge, went to the field gate lower down the lane, climbed it and walked slowly across the wet grass. About ten yards from the wire netting he paused and stood very still. For here was old Ted Carberry in his pyjamas playing an imaginary game with an imaginary child, running about like a boy, as happy as in those days that were dead.

"A case of somnambulism," said the doctor man in Jim.

And then he was attacked by that most dramatic thought.

"Is the child imaginary? Supposing the child is there and I can't see her?"

He confessed to himself afterwards that he had felt strangely afraid, though heaven knows why he should have been afraid of the unseen ghost of little Joy Carberry. The strangeness of the whole thing seemed to push him off the comfortable foothold that a middle-aged man has—or thinks he has—on the so-called re-

alities of life. Dr. Jim was face to face with an experience that seemed wildly abnormal. He tried to explain it to himself with various psycho-medical phrases that only took him round the corner.

Meanwhile old Carberry played his game.

"Five—four! Now then, Joy."

"He'll kill himself," said the doctor.

Yet Dr. Jim did not interfere. He was quite prepared to stay there all night and see how the game ended, but he was not kept there more than half an hour. Old Carberry's invisible opponent appeared to win the set, and Edward Carberry went through all the formalities of collecting the balls, slackening the net, and putting on an imaginary coat.

"Come on, Joy, time to rest."

And he disappeared among the rhododendrons, holding an invisible child by an invisible hand.

Dr. Jim mounted his bicycle and cycled home.

"What ought I to do?"

That was the burden of his thoughts as he undressed and got into bed. How long had this shadow-play been going on, this dream game in which the spirit of an old man played with the spirit of his dead child? Was it a case for interference, for the intrusion of a busybody? Dr. Jim looked at the moon through his bedroom window, and thought not. If Edward Carberry walked in his sleep into some strange and happy world where he met the soul of his dead child—well, so much the better. Why interrupt the dream and insist upon being obvious?

"But if that good lady discovers this dear old madman's dream there will be the devil of a to-do!"

Dr. Jim left it at that.

Three days later the gardener's boy cycled down from Carberry Hill with a letter for Dr. Jim. The boy had orders to catch the doctor before he started on his morning's round, and to follow him if he had already started, but Dr. Jim was in his garden looking at his fruit trees. The letter was from the second Mrs. Carberry, and Dr. Jim guessed what it would tell him.

DEAR DR. JIM.—Please come at once. A most unpleasant thing has happened. I will explain it to you in person.

THE TENNIS-COURT

Dr. Jim put the letter in his pocket.

"Enter Dame Commonsense," he thought. "Now, I wonder what she wants me to do?"

He found Mrs. Carberry in what was for her a state of considerable agitation. It appeared that old Carberry was still in bed, sleeping the sleep of happy exhaustion, and Mrs. Carberry took Dr. Jim out into the garden and told him what had happened.

"One of the maids saw Mr. Carberry go downstairs after everybody else was asleep. She thought it strange, and that Mr. Carberry looked very peculiar, and the girl came and called me. I found my husband undoing the front door. He took no notice of me and he did not appear to hear me when I spoke to him. I put on a mackintosh and a pair of goloshes and followed him out into the garden. And where do you think he went?"

Dr. Jim assumed complete ignorance.

"He went to the tennis-court. He seemed to be able to find his way there with the greatest ease, and then he began to run about and to shout, just as though he were playing a game."

She was very upset about it; annoyed.

"He kept calling out, 'Joy, Joy,' the name of his child, you know. He seemed to imagine that she was there."

Dr. Jim stared at the horizon.

"Supposing she was there," he said.

The second Mrs. Carberry looked at him with astonished pity.

"You surely don't mean to say that you, a doctor and a man of science——"

Dr. Jim smiled a faint smile.

"I am a very ignorant person," he said, "but doesn't it work out much like this? If Mr. Carberry imagines that she is there, so much so that he can play a game with her, well, to all intents and purposes she is there."

Louisa Carberry was shocked.

"I don't approve of such quibbling," she said; "I hope I am too loyal a wife to wish to see my husband exhausting himself, making himself ridiculous."

Dr. Jim did not argue the matter.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Why, my dear sir, what is a doctor to do?"

Dr. Jim appeared to be thinking. He was not quite sure of his arguments, and he wanted to gain time.

"Before I offer any advice, I must see for myself."

Her common sense agreed with that.

"Certainly. I wish you to see it for yourself. Then we can decide how the delusion is to be dealt with."

Dr. Jim went to see Mr. Carberry and found him asleep with a smile on his face. The doctor sat down and watched him, and while he watched he thought. It almost seemed to him that Ted Carberry's dream-life was the real life, far more real and satisfying and human than his daily association with that very practical person downstairs. Why interfere with it? Had anyone the right to interfere with it?

He went below and met the lady.

"Well?" she asked.

"He is asleep. I did not disturb him."

Dr. Jim walked up from the village by the light of the full moon. He stood concealed among the shrubs beside the drive, and a little before midnight he saw Edward Carberry come out of the house and make his way towards the meadow. Dr. Jim followed him, and again he stood and watched that strange dream-game, an old man playing with the spirit of his child. And something very unusual happened to Dr. Jim. The heart of him was touched as it had not been touched for many years.

"It would be sacrilege," he said, "to wake him."

But the second Mrs. Carberry did not think so. She was a practical woman, and she had told the world that she had married Edward Carberry because the poor old dear needed taking care of. She was perfectly sincere. It was not a question of an income and a big house, for Louisa Carberry was a woman of means, perhaps wealthier than her husband. She had managed people all her life, and she was convinced that it was her business to manage the last years of Joy's father.

"You have got to cure him," she said to Dr. Jim.

Jim, sitting very square on the sofa, confessed that he had come to a very different conclusion.

"I don't feel justified in interfering."

"Not justified! And you a doctor!"

He turned to explain, and his explanation involved him in a brisk cross-examination.

"So much depends on what you call curing him," he said.

"I suppose you would hardly call his present condition normal."

Dr. Jim ignored the sarcasm.

"No, it is not normal. But there is such a thing as the super-normal."

"If you mean the abnormal—"

"My dear lady, I don't. But supposing we interfere with what appears to be a rather happy delusion, may not the second state be worse than the first?"

She was shocked.

"I disagree. I disagree with you utterly. I shall have the gate of the tennis-court wired up to-night."

Dr. Jim looked at her almost fiercely.

"Then, madam," he said, "it is very probable that you will kill him."

She answered him at once.

"This running about at night, half dressed, will kill him. You, being his doctor, know that he has a heart."

Dr. Jim nodded.

"May I suggest," he said, "that it would be a happier death for him, playing with that ghost child in the moonlight, than if you killed him by shutting him out of his dream?"

Mrs. Carberry rose and rang the bell.

"I do not think you are a fit person to be responsible for my husband. I wish you to have no more to do with the case. I shall wire to Sir Royce Quinnell, the nerve specialist, and ask him to come down to-morrow."

Dr. Jim rose.

"May I ask you one question?"

"Well?"

"You still mean to fasten up that wire gate in the netting?"

"I do."

"I'm sorry," he said, and walked out of the room.

Most of the patients noticed an unusual absent-mindedness in Dr. Jim. He asked Mrs. Keyser, of Squire Hall, to put out her tongue, and then forgot to look at it. In one cottage he left his hat on a chair, and the woman had to run out after him with a cry of: "Doctor, you've forgot your hat." The incident did not embarrass Dr. Jim. He just smiled a sort of far-away smile, thanked the woman, and rode on. The fact was, he was lost in a mysterious sympathy for old Edward Carberry. It hurt him to picture that pathetic figure struggling with the wired-

up gate, beating the wings of its soul against the cage, shut out of paradise and away from Joy. Dr. Jim felt convinced that the shock of it might kill him, and if it did not kill him—

"I suppose one could hardly expect him to understand it," he thought; "we are such egoists, all of us. She wants to put his soul in a flower-pot, her own particular flower-pot. Somehow, I feel that I have got to do it. Yes, I will do it."

Just about dusk that evening Dr. Jim strolled out and took the lane to Carberry Hill. He had a pair of pliers in his pocket, and treachery towards the second Mrs. Carberry in his heart. It was very dark when he reached the gate in the meadow hedge; the moon had not risen yet; there was no wind moving, and the night was very still. Dr. Jim stood and listened. Then he climbed the field gate and walked cautiously across the grass till he reached the wire netting that shut in the tennis-court. Again he stopped to listen. There was not a sound. Dr. Jim knew where the gate was, and he worked his way along the netting till he found it. The gate had been wired up! Mrs. Carberry was a woman of character.

Dr. Jim brought out those pliers and cut the wire loops that fastened the gate.

Presently the moon rose above the tops of the beech trees in Carberry Wood, and Dr. Jim, who had been walking up and down the lane, went and leant over the field gate and waited. He felt that he had done a good deal, even though it was the most unprofessional act of his whole career. If Sir Royce Quinnell came to Carberry Hill, Dr. Jim, knowing the great specialist's reputation, felt sure that Edward Carberry's dream would be interpreted by a man of understanding.

But there was to be no other interpretation of Edward Carberry's dream. Dr. Jim saw the little figure in white come down out of the shadowy garden, and play its last game with that invisible child.

"Come on, Joy, come on."

He ran about, striking at invisible balls, laughing and talking to Joy.

"Why, you are beating me—"

And then came that last happy cry.

"Love—forty. Love—"

Dr. Jim saw Edward Carberry collapse upon the grass, and when he reached him Joy's father was dead.

No 1

The Thrilling Account of how an Old Shipper "came back" By



CAPTAIN BEN FARISH a briskly into the last private office of the president of the Blue Line, slapped his old hat upon the polished mahogany desk, dragged up one of the massive leather chairs, and sat down.

"Mornin', Jim my, called cheerily. "How nearly new and almost president?"

Young James Prescott did not raise his eyes, but a pin of annoyance stole over his face as he over the letters he was signing.

"Good morning, Captain Farish," said evenly. "I'll be with you presently."

The older man, sixty-five, keen-eyed as an ash oar, started, puzzling.

"Captain Farish?" he repeated quizzically. "What's the matter with Ben, Jimmy?"

The young man did not reply, but he look up, but calmly continued his name just above the magic type word, "President," at the bottom of sheet. Finally he stuck the elaboration between his teeth, seized a blotter, and with great care absorbed the superfluous ink each sheet. Captain Farish looked at but shrugged his shoulders and with an admiring eye about the appointments of the room—at the paintings upon the brown-burlapped quiet floor, at the massive furniture gradually a grin stole over his humoured and weather-beaten features.

"Wonder how your old dad would liked this," he murmured, half to "Not much like the cabin of the old nor yet like the old place down e Street. By hokey, when I think of place down there and the way it smell, I wonder how your old man Jim. Did you know I got the ship to put the captain's old desk—the

Prose

Nov 1919

Kitty Sees the World

By Warwick Deeping

"He switched off the engine and let the boat drift, and then suddenly he began to make violent love to her, even tried to get her into his arms. But she had more pluck and spirit than the bully imagined, and fear made her reckless. She struck him full in the face, broke loose, and shrinking away, menaced him with a little stiletto that she had pulled out of her hat."



IN one of the little fitting-rooms at "Benisons" a fair girl with the face of an audacious and delightful child was trying on dresses. Now and again she would escape from the hands of the famous Madame Yvonne, and dash out into the great sales-room where all those delicate and distracting "creations" made the place look like some gorgeous flower-garden. And the young ladies of "Benisons," defying all the conventions of the establishment, would gather round and admire this most unusual of customers.

"Take the peacock blue, dear. It's a dream."

"And she must have blue stockings and blue shoes."

"Of course. I rather liked her in that black thing with the gold tissue."

The whole business was original in the extreme, even suggestive of musical comedy, for a month ago Kitty Marsland had been a mannequin in this same department, a girl whose beautiful figure had persuaded plainer women into buying the dresses that Kitty had helped to make alive. Then some old codger of an uncle had left her a thousand pounds in cash, and "Benisons" had discovered that Kitty had a sense of adventure.

"Invest! Not a bit of it. How much should I get a year? Just about forty pounds. No—girls—I'm

going to have the six months of my life."

The feminine part of "Benisons" had listened in wonder and envy.

"Six months in the South of France. I'm going to have my one big fling. You can call me a little fool—if you like."

The envious among them did not hesitate to oblige her, even if they refrained from condemning her to her face. Mr. Spiers, the sandy-haired Socrates of the silk department, took the responsibility of advising her as to the future. He was a bachelor and ready to be sentimental.

"Why don't you put it into 'rubber'?"

He amplified the suggestion.

"You might double it—twice over. Think what that would mean—capital, start your own little business, be independent. Fancy chucking away all that money——"

He swallowed with emotion, and even went on to hint that he was sentimentally interested in her welfare—but Kitty discouraged him. She did not like Mr. Spiers.

"I shall be better at spending," she said.

Which saying Mr. Spiers took to be the sign of a frivolous and depraved spirit.

But there were women and girls in "Benisons" who understood. This mad adventure, this flash of extravagance was a protest against "stodge," against stew and suet pudding for dinner and bread and margarine for tea. How many of them had longed to wear the beautiful dresses that they handled but

Kitty Sees the World

could never buy. How many of them had dreamed of that large, free, sumptuous life, the life of the "Box" as imagined by the "Gallery." And the dream chance had come to Kitty. They almost loved her for having the audacity and the irresponsible innocence to seize it.

"Where are you going to stay, dear?"

"At Monte Santo—to begin with."

They gasped.

"Monte Santo! And perhaps you'll gamble?"

"Perhaps I shall."

"And afterwards—you'll come back to 'Benisons'?"

"I'm not going to think of the afterwards—yet," she told them.

So that day in February came when Kitty Marsland, wearing a set of fifty-guinea furs bought wholesale at Meakins in the City, and her box full of seductive fimsies, took the boat from Dover to Calais, and drifted towards the blue south.

Everybody knows the Hotel de Paris at Monte Santo, that most cosmopolitan hotel, full of smart people who wish to be thought wicked, and wicked people who are too respectable to be smart. You can see Grand Dukes there, Jews, Greeks, Trust Magnates, and even Bishops. They say that all sorts of diplomatic blackguardisms have been conceived and concocted at the Hotel de Paris. A thoroughly rotten place, and the haunt of rotten people.

To this cosmopolitan "clearing-house" came Kitty Marsland, a very innocent and babyish thing, a little cheeky perhaps, but full of adventurous illusions. She took a south room on the top floor, and lived for two days in a state of bewilderment and suppressed fright. The place was so huge, the people so very splendid. The waiters and the maids scared her not a little, and she felt tempted to call the big Swiss *chasseur* "sir."

Her freshness saved her, and a certain vivacious and youthful im-

pulsiveness that had made her loved at "Benisons." On her third night there was a dance in the ball-room of the Hotel de Paris, and Kitty—who had been hiding in a dim corner of the lounge—found her feet and her destiny when the music began. It was irresistible. She had been the dancer of dancers at "Benisons," where the girls had set no mean standard.

She drifted shyly into the great room, an aery, graceful thing in myosotis blue. And a young French diplomat, rather blasé and contemptuous of smart women, saw her—and knew that she could dance.

"Mademoiselle, is it possible for me to have the honour?"

She went out with him into the world of music and moving colour. And the Frenchman's eyes shone, *Mon Dieu*—but she could dance. So could he.

The partnership continued for two more dances, till competitors intervened. Kitty and the French boy were the two experts in the great room, and other people stood to watch them. Men looked, and looked again. The aery figure in myosotis blue became a thing to be pursued, courted. Before the evening was over Kitty had danced with two Barons, an Italian Count, a famous crook, and a millionaire. She was the dominant feminine thing in the room, and wholeheartedly disliked by the greater number of the women.

"She ees what you call 'so fraish,' said one of the Barons to an English banker.

That was just it. Kitty was like a bunch of roses set down among a crowd of languid hot-house flowers. She laughed—because she liked laughing. Her very frankness—her unconventional impudence, delighted the men.

"Vulgar little chit," was the term applied by Lady Lorna Ponsonby.

"Men make me sick," added a friend. "Give them a fluffy-haired shop girl and they are always ready to make fools of themselves."

From that night the Hotel de

By Warwick Deeping

Paris chose to recognise Kitty Marsland as part of the joy of life. She appeared to have money, and only the women troubled about her origin and asked her sweet venomous questions. All the men wanted to flirt with her, and no doubt she was a little bit dazzled. There was nothing of the cat or the cynic about Kitty, and she did not mistrust these worldlings or realise how frail her wings were.

One day that oddity, Lionel Quayle, arrived at the Hotel de Paris. He was a quiet young man, with a thin-lipped mouth and a square chin, and blue eyes that looked you square in the face. Kitty liked him the very first time they met. He happened to open a door for her, and his eyes and manner made him seem different from other men.

She wondered who he was. Other people seemed to know him by sight; he was a good deal stared at, though the interest he aroused did not seem to trouble him in the least. He went about in his quiet, unconcerned way; rarely speaking to anybody, and avoiding all women. He played the piano well; Kitty caught him dashing off one of Chopin's waltzes in the ball-room. Also he sketched a little, and was fond of making little splodgy colour portraits of that beautiful southern coast.

At last she asked young Bates, of the Consulate, who the man was.

"What—you don't know Quayle, the champion middle-weight boxer!"

"A prize-fighter!"

"Well—if you like to call it, that."

"But he doesn't look like a prize-fighter."

"More like a gentleman—what! Extraordinary chap. Quiet—but can fight like a tiger. And damned clever, too. Can talk about art and all that. Believe he has pots of money."

"But—but does he fight now?"

"Don't know. He just travels about and sees life. There are no flies on Quayle—I guess."

Then, quite suddenly, this eccentric man with the vivid blue eyes developed an interest in Kitty. She became aware of him in a dozen different ways. They were always meeting on the stairs, in the lounge, in the casino gardens, in the casino itself. Kitty had a feeling of being watched, studied by a man whose habit was to avoid women.

One evening he came across and spoke to her in the lounge, and did it quite naturally and without a trace of shyness. In fact, he was quaintly direct—as though he were striking a blow.

"I want to know you."

She smiled up at him.

"Why not?"

He sat down beside her.

"My name's Quayle. I used to fight for money. I've made my money, in one way or another, and I'm just seeing life."

His frankness delighted her.

"And my name is Marsland—Kitty Marsland. Two months ago I worked in a shop. I'm seeing life too."

"You have worked for your living?"

"Yes."

"Thank God," he said. "I'm so tired of these parasites."

He was an oddity, so lean and strong and quiet, so grim and yet so boyish, so shrewd and yet so utterly without guile. Somehow he made other men look small, affected and flimsy, and he came into the midst of Kitty's adventure just when it reached its crisis.

She had been going to the Golf Club at Bourbie, one of the fashionable lounging places, and there Prince Rupprecht of Thorn had seen her, a huge, round-headed young German aristocrat with no enviable reputation. He was immensely wealthy, and a thoroughly dissolute animal, with a depraved thirst for novelty and any new spice for his coarse palate. And Kitty piqued him. He called her the "Rosebud with the dewy mouth," and got himself introduced to her

Kitty Sees the World

by the Rosencrantzs, two Jew worldlings who lived at the Hotel de Paris.

One could not have picked out two more strangely-contrasted rivals than Quayle and this German aristocrat, and they were rivals for the love of a little girl who had been no more than a mannequin two months ago. The German wanted the girl's beauty, just to crush it for his own pleasure; Quayle wanted more than that, the fresh happy soul of this little woman who knew what earning her own living meant. He had sensed a brave and adventurous mate in her, the dear comrade he had never found until now.

"You have got to play golf," he told her in his blunt way.

"Why?"

"Because it is better than loafing about in that club-house. It is always better to be out in the air doing things."

"But I can't play golf."

"Then I'll teach you."

And so he did, loving her the more as they spent many hours together wandering over that spectacular course with its pine woods and little rocky hills and stretches of artificial grass. Quayle taught her to swing, held her hands with his, and bent her, so to speak, into the classic style. Kitty was quick, willowy and unself-conscious; she picked up the grace and the style of the game like a dancer, laughing at her early futilities and making Quayle in love with her laughter.

Then Lionel Quayle went to Paris for a week on business, and the Prince intervened.

"You will bring that young woman to play this silly game of golf with me," he told his jackal, and Paul Rosencrantz passed the order to his wife.

Stella Rosencrantz was a plump and rather pretty Jewess, with soothing manners and fine eyes. She had been cultivating a friendship for Kitty, posing as a "dear creature" whose great grief was that she had no children.

"This frivolous life, it wearies me," she confessed. Her attack upon Kitty opened with soft flattery.

"You will break too many hearts, my dear," she said; "even our most charming aristocrat is smitten. He wishes to play golf with us—and you."

"You mean that fat German?"

Stella Rosencrantz held up her hands.

"My dear, how irreverent you are! The Prince is a very eminent and charming person. You do not realise how you are being flattered. Every woman at the club will envy you."

"Very well. I don't mind."

They went up that afternoon, and the Prince behaved most charmingly. He insisted on taking Kitty as his partner, and though he played an atrocious game, and they blocked the course for a dozen other couples, they beat the Rosencrantzs by three and two. He made love to Kitty, but did it quite cleverly. She had learnt to keep tame young men at arm's length, and she made the mistake of thinking that this German was no more dangerous.

He asked to have the honour of being allowed to take her out in his motor-boat.

"It ees lovely—and so queeck—queeck as a racehorse. You see all zees grand scenery. And we go fast—faster than all ze udder boats—"

He seemed an amiable sort of giant, and she was flattered. Besides—it would be part of the great adventure. If "Benisen's" could only see her being entertained by a German Prince!

Rupprecht called for her in his big car next day, and drove her down to the harbour. She had expected Stella Rosencrantz as a partner, but Stella had pleaded a headache. Yet another surprise was in store for Kitty.

The Prince helped her into the white boat, climbed in, and arranged her cushions. The mechanic had started the engine.

"Get out."

By Warwick Deeping

The mechanic obeyed the curt order, and Kitty found herself alone with the Prince in the white boat as it glided out of the harbour.

He smiled at her a queer, sly smile.

"The sea is very beautiful, my rosebud."

For the next minute or so he was busy with the engine and guiding the flashing bows of the boat past yachts and launches at anchor. Then they struck out into the open sea, and the grand mountainous coast spread itself before them. The sea was as calm and blue as the sky, and Monte Santo began to look like a little white pigmy town under the purple hills.

"Well—my little rosebud."

One of his big hands rested on her knee, and his heavy face looked into hers. And for the first time in her life Kitty felt afraid of a man, and afraid of being alone.

"It is very kind of you—your Highness."

"Kind, ees it? Oh yes, I am very kind."

"But I don't want to go too far. I have an engagement at twelve o'clock."

He laughed.

"*Himmel*—what does that matter? You are zo very pretty. I just stop ze boat—zo."

He switched off the engine and let the boat drift, and then suddenly he began to make violent love to her, even tried to get her into his arms. But she had more pluck and spirit than the bully imagined, and fear made her reckless. She struck him full in the face, broke loose, and shrinking away, menaced him with a little stiletto that she had pulled out of her hat.

"Ach—you leetle vixen—"

"There is a boat coming."

It was true. The Prince turned his head and swore.

"Eet is that God damn American. Whenever I go out he comes for to race. I beat him, but no matter, he comes again."

Kitty blessed the American enthu-

siast, for the Prince started up the engine in a sulky rage, and headed back for the harbour. He put her ashore at the jetty, and Kitty went straight to her hotel.

"The mean beast," she said to herself. "My prize-fighter would not have behaved like that."

His High and Mightiness was in no sweeter temper. He had all the arrogance of the Teuton, and his appetite was his god. He sent for his toady Rosencrantz, and gave him his orders.

"This leetle English mees—I make her my meestress. It must be arranged. I give you five days."

And Rosencrantz went away in a panic. He had good reasons for being afraid of Rupprecht of Thorn, and he knew that if he failed he would be shown no pity.

His ingenuity supplied him with a plot, and that melting-eyed wife of his offered herself as a gentle persuader. They sat up half the night concocting their scheme, and next morning he went off to see Herr Bhoem, who kept a private gambling establishment in Monte Santo.

"It is necessary that someone should lose money. The Prince wishes it."

Herr Bhoem was also afraid of the Prince.

"It is the custom for people to lose money here," he said.

"She must lose all her money. My wife and I will play, and we shall lose too, just to make it appear natural. We shall lose two thousand francs. Of course, it will be returned to us."

"And what do I receive?"

"You win the young woman's money, and the Prince will say nothing about that affair at Baden."

Herr Bhoem agreed.

Rosencrantz also interviewed the proprietor of the Hotel de Paris, who happened to be a German.

"The Prince wishes to know how much money Miss Marsland happens to owe you."

"I have not presented a bill for three weeks."

Kitty Sees the World

"Then the Prince wishes no bill to be presented to her till I give you instructions."

"The Prince shall be obeyed."

Of course Kitty suspected nothing of what was being schemed against her when Stella Rosencranty drew her aside with an air of affectionate mystery and made an appeal to her spirit of adventure.

"Paul and I are going to gamble to-night, and we shall win a lot of money. It's at a private house. Would you like to come with us?"

"Will the Prince be there?"

"The Prince? He never goes to a small place like this."

"And how do you know you are going to win money?"

Stella grew confidential.

"Paul has a sort of second sight, an instinct. I have hardly ever known him to lose. And I may tell you, dear, in confidence—that we should be very poor if he didn't win a little money sometimes—"

"I think I'll come. It will be so exciting."

"Of course you need not play, dear."

Kitty laughed.

"Oh—I don't know—I'm human. I should like to win money."

"The stakes are rather high here—but of course one wins the more. If you were to play—"

"And follow Paul's lead—I might win quite a lot of money."

"My dear, why, I never thought of that!"

Some of the best women are born gamblers, and even the shrewdest of them are led away by sanguine and adventurous visions of some phenomenal piece of luck. Kitty believed in Stella Rosencranty. She also told herself that she could begin by being cautious, and she showed her caution by going to her bank and withdrawing every penny she had in it. She still possessed three hundred pounds in her bank at home, and three hundred pounds seemed a splendid reserve.

The Rosencrantys carried her off with them that evening. She was

flushed and excited, and made no concealment of the fact that she meant to gamble.

"I'm going to do just what your husband does, and I feel I shall win."

The Rosencrantys nudged each other. Even the melting Jewess had no pity.

Herr Bhoem's salon was rather a shabby place, but with plenty of gilding on the walls. The long green table had seen better days; so had the people seated round it. The whole affair had been staged; even the players were so many "supers." Herr Bhoem knew his business, and was very much afraid of the Prince.

The game was bacarat, and money seemed to be passing freely. A big, black-bearded man was holding the bank. Chairs were found for Kitty and the Rosencrantys, and Paul Rosencranty began to play. He won at once, and went on winning, and Stella whispered in Kitty's ear.

"You see?"

Kitty's hands were clenched on the leather vanity bag in her lap. She opened the bag and drew out a handful of notes, and asked Paul to prompt her.

She won, lost, won, and won again. The excitement of the game seized her, that feverish recklessness that does not want to think and consider. She was raw to the game and utterly innocent, and the Rosencrantys played upon her rashness. The end of it was that she lost all her money, save two gold Louis and a five-franc piece that she had left in the bottom of her bag.

She rose, managing a smile, but looking rather white about the lips.

"I think I'll go home now."

The Rosencrantys hurried her away, and found a cab waiting.

"I'm so sorry, dear. Did you lose much?"

"About two hundred pounds."

"Oh—my dear! But, of course—to a wealthy woman like you—"

Kitty laughed bitterly.

"Wealthy! I've nothing left out here. It was all I had."

By Warwick Deeping

She went to bed, a little dazed and very miserable, hating the Rosencrantys, yet feeling that she had no right to blame them. Hadn't Rosencranty lost money also, money that he could ill afford to lose? And they had not pressed her to play. She realised that she would have to wire to her bankers at home for a part of that three hundred pounds, and the thought shocked her. She saw the great adventure dwindling, dwindling until it trickled back into the showroom at "Benisons," and ended there. She felt very lonely and sad, and she wept at little, and being a woman—she wanted someone to comfort her, and that someone took the shape of Lionel Quayle. Yes, Lionel Quayle. How strong and straight he was.

Kitty ordered her breakfast to be brought to her room next morning. Lying on the tray she saw one of the hotel envelopes, and written on it in the familiar hand of the clerk in the cashier's office—"Miss Marsland, Room 304." Her bill!

She tore open the envelope, and looked at the figures with a sense of bewilderment. Did she owe as much as that? Well, after all, she could explain things to the proprietor, and he would take a cheque on her London bank.

She made a poor breakfast, dressed rather hurriedly, and went down to interview the proprietor. He was a suave, cynical, clean-shaven man, very polite and cold. He asked her into his private room.

"You cannot pay your bill, Miss Marsland? Indeed! No—I cannot take a cheque. We have found it so necessary to protect ourselves. I am sorry—but I shall have to ask you to find accommodation elsewhere."

"Leave the hotel?"

Kitty was astounded.

"Yes. And I'm afraid I shall have to impound your boxes and keep them till this bill is settled."

Kitty was desperate, furious.

"You treat me like a thief."

He shrugged politely.

"Mademoiselle, strange people come to Monte Santo."

"But I have the money. I have only to send to England."

He shrugged again.

"I must ask you to leave. My staff will be ordered not to let your luggage be removed."

She rose and left him, angry, miserably disillusioned.

"What greedy beasts!"

And then began a day's struggle at self-rescue. She flew to Stella Rosencranty's room, only to find that the Rosencrantys were out. Putting on her hat she went to her bankers, and discovered them as polite and as cynical as the proprietor of the Hotel de Paris. They would not trust her with a penny. She thought of her jewellery, such as it was, and venturing into one or two shops, tried—with an angry sense of outraged pride—to raise money on it, but the shopkeepers were sharks. One of them offered to buy back a seed pearl necklace for a quarter of the money she had paid for it a few weeks ago. Her spirit flared up at the insult and the man's slimy, casual manner. No—she would not bargain or treat with these rotten people. She would rather appeal to the police, get herself trained back to England, despite the ignominy.

And Lionel Quayle! A lump rose in her throat. She did want so much to see him again. And in two days he would be back at Monte Santo.

As a matter of fact, the gentleman in question was equally eager to see her, and was sitting in a corner of the Paris express then not ten miles' distant from Monte Santo. He was returning two days earlier than he had intended. Paris and love had made him restless.

Kitty lunched at a little restaurant near the harbour, and the lunch compelled her to change one of her twenty-franc pieces. After lunch she wandered up to the cliff gardens, and found a favourite seat of hers under a stone pine. She wanted to

Kitty Sees the World

think things out, to solve the problem of the next few days. And there it was that Stella Rosencrantz found her, Stella who was a little breathless and frightened after hunting her sedulously for two hours.

"Oh—my dear—what has happened?"

She sat down beside Kitty and took one of her hands.

"Happened? I have been cleared out of the hotel, and they have kept my boxes. I couldn't pay my bill—you see."

"It's scandalous. They told me you had gone, and Paul insisted on an explanation. I went at once to my Aunt Phoebe, who has a big villa here, and she'll be charmed to have you as her guest."

"But how good of you. I didn't know you had any relations here."

"Well—you see—Aunt Phoebe is rather eccentric, and a trifle religious. She's immensely rich, and she never quite approved of my marrying Paul."

"And she will give me a home for a few days, till I can clear up this wretched business?"

"Gladly."

Kitty turned impulsively, and kissed her pseudo-friend.

"You dear. Oh—I'm so happy."

"I'll take you there at once—if you like. I think the Hotel de Paris people have behaved scandalously."

Meanwhile Lionel Quayle was saying the very same thing to the Agag of a proprietor, and using fierce but polite language. He had found Kitty absent, had asked for an explanation, and been given it, and the German proprietor was trying to appease a very angry and a very threatening man.

"We cannot afford to be philanthropists, monsieur."

"Philanthropists! That's rather different from being an insolent and greedy cad. Let me have that bill."

It was presented, and he paid it.

"Now—I want to know where Miss Marsland is to be found."

The proprietor could not say.

"She went out. She must be somewhere in Monte Santo. Monsieur might inquire of the police or at the station."

Quayle went in search of her, and by an odd coincidence the road to the station took him past the end of the lane that led to Prince Rupprecht's villa—the Villa des Tulipes Jaunes. He happened to glance up that lane just at the very moment when Stella Rosencrantz and her protégée stopped in front of the Prince's gate. Stella Rosencrantz's hand was stretched out to the iron bell handle, and Kitty was standing and looking up at the big house.

Quayle strolled on, stopped, and stared thoughtfully at the high wall and the row of cypresses that surrounded the villa. To whom did the place belong?

A postman came down the lane, with an empty leather satchel over his shoulder. Quayle stopped him.

"Pardon me, monsieur, but can you tell me who lives there?"

The Frenchman stared, and then spat expressively against the wall.

"A Boche. Prince Rupprecht of Thorn."

Matters moved very rapidly during the next two hours. Quayle, with a "Good God!" walked straight in through the Prince's gate, ignoring the janitor, and was met by a manservant at the top of the white steps of the villa.

"The two ladies who have just arrived are expecting me."

He spoke in German, being a linguist as well as a boxer.

"But—Mein Herr——"

Quayle stepped past the man.

"I'm in a hurry. Which room?"

He made a very dramatic entry into a richly furnished little salon, where a fat frau in a black dress and lace cap was playing the part of the solemn aunt. Kitty sprang up with a delight that could not be concealed, eyes alight, her pretty face aflush. The two other women stared at Quayle rather helplessly.

"Oh—Lion, I'm so glad you've come."

By Warwick Deeping

He walked across and took her hands.

"So am I, dear, in many ways."

Kitty turned to Aunt Phoebe.

"I lost all my money, Lion, and they turned me out of the hotel, and Mrs. Rosencrantz's aunt—Madame Phoebe Khün—has offered me a home in her villa for a few days. Isn't it kind—"

But she stopped abruptly, astonished by the blank faces of Stella Rosencrantz and her aunt. Discomfiture and extreme embarrassment sat enthroned there. And Quayle was smiling down at them with ice blue eyes.

He led Kitty across to the window.

"Do you know who this house belongs to, dear?"

"Why, Lion, to Madame Khün."

"I think not. It belongs to Prince Rupprecht of Thorn."

He saw her face whiten and the pupils of her eyes dilate.

"The Prince! But they told me . . . The liars—!"

She turned on Stella Rosencrantz—but that lady was already vanishing with a flutter of skirts. She did not stay to explain, but fled out of the house and down the drive at a pace between a walk and a run. The frau also had no desire to remain in a room whose atmosphere had grown so embarrassing.

"Oh—Lion. How horrible! If you hadn't come and warned me—"

He put a protecting arm across her shoulders.

"What has happened, child, while I was away?"

She told him of the affair of the motor-beat, the loss of her money, and the way she had been tricked into coming to the villa.

Quayle's face grew stormy.

"The infernal scoundrels! I shall have something to say to this German. Thank God the luck was with us, dear."

He crossed the room and rang the bell, and the German manservant appeared.

"The Prince is at home!"

"Yes, sir."

"Give him my compliments, and say that a gentleman wishes to speak with him in the garden."

He turned again to Kitty.

"Come. I'll find you a seat in the shade. I must have a few words with this autocrat."

She looked at him anxiously.

"Take me away, Lion. . . . And he's such a big beast."

"I'm glad he is," he said.

They went into the garden, and Quayle made her sit down on a shady seat by the gate. He took care to see that the gate was unlocked and the key safe in his own pocket.

Then the Prince arrived. He was very angry, and hot, and big, but he did not look at Kitty at all, but only at Lionel Quayle.

"Get out of my garden," he said, "you English swinehound."

The chastening of Rupprecht of Thorn took just three minutes. He was a strong beast and raging for a fight, but he had no chance from the very first blow Quayle struck him. It was a whirlwind affair, and Rupprecht was left lying flat, with a broken jaw and his face all bloody. Quayle was untouched.

He took Kitty's arm and led her away.

"Justice done for once," he said; "now we will go back to the Hotel de Paris."

"Oh—Lion, not there. Take me right away from these rotten people."

"You have discovered how rotten they are, have you?" he asked, looking at her tenderly.

"Yes."

"I'm going to get your luggage. And then—?"

"Well?"

"Supposing we go and get married, say in Florence—or Venice—?"

"Oh—Lion—but I've only three hundred pounds—"

"You dear little soul," he said, and kissed her in full view of the whole street.

WARWICK DEEPING.

Prasfer *The Green Jade Dress* *July 1915*

The Jade Green Dress

A case of being "in the soup"
in both senses of the phrase

By Warwick Deeping



TWO excited women and a cardboard box which bore the label of Messrs. Rome and Raymond, of Regent Street! "You—open it," said the mother, smiling and looking a little flushed. "Motherkin, you are a dear!" "I like to do things thoroughly. I could not let you go to the Londons' in that old pink thing. So that's that."

The lid was lifted, wrappings of tissue paper turned aside, and out of the brown husk of the box burst that jade green evening frock, magical as leaves in spring, fresh and innocent as a flower.

The girl said nothing; there was nothing to be said for the moment. She held the dress out at arm's length, her colour bright and hot, her brown eyes tremulous with an emotion that was deeper than vain joy. This dress was more than a mere sheath of green silk. It smelt of self-sacrifice, of weeks of careful manipulation of the household funds by the little grey-haired woman whose excitement was as great as the girl's.

"You dear!"

Someone was kissed with tenderness and gentle impetuosity.

"It is just your colour, Joyce. The right colour for your hair. Hold it up—under your chin."

Mrs. Probyn looked critically at her girl and nodded. Yes, the dress was the very thing, but Kate Probyn also nodded at sundry wise conclusions which had framed themselves within her mother's head. "Yes, she will look as well as any of the rich young hussies. . . . I could not have sent the child to stay at Gurneys with that old pink frock. Sensitive! Of course she is, and so am I."

Joyce had turned to the mirror, where her red-gold head and soft pallor were reflected above the sheath of green.

"It's lovely. Need I take the pink ninon?"

"Of course not," said the mother. "That dress would kill poor pinkie. Besides, just for those few nights. You need not worry your head about that."

* * * * *

Joyce Probyn arrived at Gurneys about four o'clock on a summer afternoon. The Londons' car met her at the station, and she shared the car with two other young women who were going to the Londons' house-party. Joyce noticed that these other girls had a very great deal of luggage, so much so that a local taxi had to be chartered to act as baggage wagon. Joyce's unpretentious little fibre trunk had attached itself to the luggage grid without any affectation.

These two young women absorbed the *de luxe* seats of the limousine, and Joyce contented herself with a let-down seat with her back to the driver. She did not mind; she was curiously unspoilt and full of wholesome excitement. Her companions took very little notice of her. A half-contemptuous glance at her clothes, and glance at her face and hair which was a little less contemptuous, and the natural enemy was sized up and ignored.

"Rather a bore—these shows," said the taller of the two girls. Her name was Grace Carberry. She was dark, restless, immensely smart, and her face would have been charming had the nostrils of her little nose been less pinched and predatory, and her eyes less hard.

Her companion was languid, indolent, with sleepy, come-hither blue eyes. She drawled. Her name was Rosamund Lane.

"Yes—rather. I've brought ten frocks, my dear. It's just a bit intriguing, though, meeting John Gretton."

Miss Carberry sneered.

"I can't stick celebrities. The man's just a show-piece. He'll expect you to know all about his adventures."

"I have read his book."

THE JADE GREEN DRESS

The dark girl gave her a veiled look.

"You puss-cat," it said, "so you are after the cream."

Joyce was sensitive, a shy girl who spread her petals quickly and closed them with equal swiftness, and being too open to suggestion she was easily overclouded by these two smart young women. In fact the incipient wilting of her confidence may be said to have begun during that drive to Gurneys. These girls were very little older than she was, but they had the serene arrogance of two premature women of the world, and Joyce looked at them as a shy freshman might look at a couple of "blues." A depressing colour, no doubt! And Joyce became depressed. She was attacked by a deadly suspicion that she was dowdy, cheap, provincial. She glanced at these other girls' clothes, the shoes, stockings, fashionable etceteras, and became too conscious of her own deficiencies. Youth swings between arrogance and too shrinking a humility, and the pot of brass is dangerous to the vessel of porcelain.

When Gurneys appeared in the midst of its parklands Joyce was ripe for a young thing's picnic.

She felt homesick. She wished she had not come. She saw herself as a creature of dowdy insignificance shrinking in a world of strange splendour, etiquettes, impressiveness, fashions. Even the jade green dress had ceased to be a garment of enchantment, proof against the arrows of envy.

The car stopped outside the huge Georgian portico of a huge Georgian house. There were men-servants in livery, devastating, terrifying beings. Joyce waited for the other two to get out. She felt paralysed, yet ready to follow gratefully in the footsteps of their cocksure serenity. They ignored her. She found herself a silent third, following them across spaces of Turkey carpet, through suggestions of aloof and disapproving grandeur into a vast drawing-room where a number of Olympians were posed for her further dejection.

A big woman came forward, a woman with a Roman nose and a mass of white hair. Everything seemed big at Gurneys.

"Well, here you are. So glad to see you."

"Simply lovely of you to ask us, Mrs. London."

"Afraid we're a bit late."

The big woman looked at Joyce, and Joyce had a horrible feeling that she was not expected, that she had to explain herself.

"I'm Joyce Probyn."

Mrs. London's eyes seemed to fill with kindly little twinkles of light.

"My dear, I'm delighted to see you. Now, come and sit by me and have some tea."

In truth this woman with the head of a Britannia was more pleased to welcome this charming and rather frightened piece of shyness than she had been to touch the confident fingers of Grace Carberry and Rosamund Lane. Such young women bored her. But what would you, modernity insists!

Joyce shrank into the crowd under Mrs. London's wing, but her hostess was a busy woman, and Joyce was left to recover herself in a silence for which she was thankful. She happened to have a chair a little apart, and her self-consciousness began to lose itself in the babel and the animation of the London drawing-room. She began to watch her fellow-humans. There were the two London boys and their three sisters, all recognizable by their likeness to their mother, a scattering of women and girls, and several men of all ages and complexions. She noticed that Miss Carberry and Miss Lane had each attached a male thing to their persons.

Chiefly she was interested in a man who stood by the fireplace talking to a middle-aged woman with a pleasant face. He looked neither young nor old; his face was almost as brown as his close-cropped hair; his eyes were a queer deep blue and very steady. He had an air of reserve, of detachment, but sometimes he smiled and his whole face seemed to light up with an air of quiet and mischievous amusement. His voice was quite inaudible in the general hubbub. To Joyce he appeared to be outside the crowd, quite apart from it, perhaps because he was so wholly and so easily himself.

She began to be aware of the fact that her interest in this quiet man was shared by most people in the room. She discovered Miss Carberry in the act of flicking swift, significant glances in his direction. The dark girl was a vivacious talker, and to Joyce it seemed that Miss



Carberry was talking to attract this particular man's attention.

And then her own eyes met his. He was looking at her fixedly, attentively, as though he had discovered something unusual, something which interested him. She coloured slightly and wondered whether she had been staring at him too much.

A voice sounded from the next chair.

"And how—do you like Gurneys?"

She found herself being beamed upon by a dear old thing in a very youthful hat.

"Well—you see, I have only just come."

Joyce got on very well with her next door neighbour, for the dear old thing in the youthful hat had taken a fancy to

Joyce, and they found plenty to talk about.

Joyce's feeling of awkwardness began to disappear,

and the Gurney drawing-room and its occupants grew less vast and awe-inspiring. She saw that the brown man had moved from the fireplace, and that he had been intercepted by Miss Carberry, who was looking up into his face and talking to him with eager animation. It struck Joyce that the brown man did not want to talk to Miss Carberry; he stood by her chair and listened politely, gravely, but with no brightening of the eyes.

A few minutes later he had vanished, and Miss Carberry was talking to one of the London boys.

It was then that Joyce discovered that

THE JADE GREEN DRESS



The Londons' drawing-room justified her shy confidence. Some eyes lit up with what she took to be appreciation

the brown man was standing beside her chair.

He smiled down at the old lady in the youthful hat; he knew her.

"Do you think we might escape—presently?"

Joyce still had her empty tea-cup on her knee.

"May I relieve you of that?"

She met his eyes, such pleasant, deep, reassuring eyes.

"Oh, thank you!"

The old lady smiled.

"My dear, I don't know your name."

"Joyce Probyn."

The brown man was standing smiling down at them.

"Mr. Gretton, may I introduce you to Miss Joyce Probyn?"

Mr. Gretton bowed.

"I am very glad to meet you. Do you think, Mrs. Cooper, that we might explore the garden?"

They passed out through one of the French windows, the old lady, Joyce and John Gretton, and quite a number of

people observed the incident, including Miss Carberry and Miss Lane.

The old lady was smiling at Gretton.

"I think we have let the lion out of his cage," she said.

Gretton laughed and looked into the shy eyes of Joyce.

"I never felt less like a lion. Are you staying here, Miss Probyn?"

Joyce said that she was. He seemed pleased.

When the dressing-gong sounded Joyce was taken up to her room by one of the London girls.

"We dine at a quarter to eight. Do you dance?"

"A little."

"Oh, it's just a rag, you know. I'll send a maid along to help you dress."

Joyce was feeling rather happy and astonished, for had she not spent a whole hour with Mr. John Gretton after Mrs. Cooper had pretended that she was tired. They had wandered all through the gardens, round the lake, and halfway across the park. She had begun by feeling frightened, at her wits' end as to what she should say to the great man, but in five minutes she had lost all fear of him, though she did not know why. He had told her that he had been less than a month in England after an absence of five years, that it was good to be back in England, and that he meant to stay there.

When a very brisk and superior young woman appeared Joyce was quite able to deal with her.

"Which dress, miss, will you wear to-night?"

"The green one," said Joyce, nodding at her one frock, which she had already laid out upon the bed.

The maid proceeded to dress her, and Joyce bore with her ministrations, though she would rather have been left alone. She did not like this brisk and rather supercilious young woman who looked as though she had a chronic cold in the head.

But the jade green dress comforted her. When the maid had gone Joyce looked at herself in the mirror, gave a contented sigh and went downstairs.

The London's drawing-room justified her shy confidence and her feeling of contentment. Some eyes lit up with what she took to be appreciation, and it is possible that the older men thought of

her as a sweet creature. As for downright and annoyed hostility, she got it from Miss Carberry, and less actively so from Miss Lane. The London girls, who were plain, may have thought it rather inconsiderate of their mother to weight the balance so heavily against them. The London boys applauded her. A peach—what! But, hang it, the Gretton chap was a bit of a thruster!

His life had taught him to be simple and direct. He liked her frock and he told her so.

"What an exquisite dress."

She flushed. The woman in her thrilled. She knew of a sudden that he liked more than the dress.

"I'm glad," she said, and got no farther, but to this man of the world her faint and innocent confusion was delightful.

And then the disaster happened. Never in the annals of the London regime had such a catastrophe been recorded, that a *bête* servant should tilt half the contents of a soup plate—and thick soup, mark you—over a guest's dress. The cataract broke on Joyce's right shoulder, and all the front of that jade green sheath was mottled brown. Mrs. London saw it and her rosy face grew redder. Gretton saw it, and his eyes looked ready to kill.

"My dear, I am sorry——"

Joyce and her hostess rose together. There was a slight commotion, considerate people ignored the incident and went on talking; Miss Carberry's face stared and registered an opaque and pleased sneer.

"My dear, shall I——"

"No, please," said Joyce, white and a little tragic. "I'd rather go——"

"Cold water. I'll send a maid."

Joyce fled, conscious that a disaster had overtaken her—a disaster the ultimate developments of which were but dimly realized. She rushed upstairs to her room, stripped off the stained frock and looked at it rather helplessly. The supercilious maid arrived and helped to apply cold water, and to make the suggestion that Joyce should put on another dress.

"I haven't one," she said, and realized her shame.

The maid seemed to sniff.

"A little ammonia, miss. I'll fetch some."

The ammonia was brought and applied,

THE JADE GREEN DRESS

but as the event proved it rendered the disaster still more disastrous. Certainly it reduced the stains to a faint brown smudginess, but it took all the colour from her silk.

"Dear, dear," said the girl, "these cheap dyes!"

Joyce said nothing. Her silence had a horrified calmness. She went to the wardrobe and took out her fawn-coloured coat and skirt, and as she put them on she realized that she could not go downstairs again. No, nothing would prevail upon her to meet the eyes of young women who had ten frocks.

"Shall I have some dinner sent up, miss?"

"Please."

Joyce was finishing this improvised meal when Mrs. London appeared. She was sympathetic, distressed, but, like many rich women, curiously obtuse. It simply did not occur to her that Joyce had only one dress. And yet she might have guessed it, for Captain Probyn's widow had nothing but her pension.

"I'd really rather stay here," said the girl. "Please let me stay here."

Mrs. London humoured her and went downstairs, thinking that Joyce was a little hysterical and too easily upset.

She remained bewildered by the catastrophe. Something in her refused to wear that dress again, even if it were possible to camouflage the stains, and for a while she could not decide what to do. About nine o'clock Mrs. Cooper penetrated into Joyce's room, but Joyce was too hard put to it to confess even to this most comforting of women. Moreover, she had arrived at the only possible solution of the difficulty that her wits could suggest. Mrs. Cooper, half suspecting the truth but too wise to assume the offensive, kissed her good night and left her to complete a half-finished letter.

Joyce wrote to her mother: "Send me a wire to come home—at once. You must, dear. Say you are ill. I'll explain everything when I see you."

This was the night of Thursday, and Joyce calculated that if she slipped out early and posted the letter in the village her mother would receive it by the first post on Saturday. That would leave the evening of Friday to be disposed of, and she decided to dispose of it by having a headache.

But how tantalizing! How tragic! Just when she had begun—! She went to bed and tried to sleep.

Joyce woke at five. She was up and dressed by half-past six. Breakfast was at nine, and venturing downstairs about seven o'clock she managed to elude the supercilious maid and to escape out of the cool vastness of Gurneys into the garden. She fled; she thought herself unobserved, but she was seen by a certain person whose habit it was to cold-tub himself at six and walk a couple of miles before breakfast.

Joyce was half-way to Gurney village when she was overtaken in the green deeps of a woodland lane. She heard footsteps behind her and looked round. She saw John Gretton, bare-headed, in white flannels, striding serenely in the cool of the morning. And Joyce stood still. What else was there to do!

"Good morning; I thought I was the only one who did this sort of thing."

He ranged up beside her.

"May I join you?"

"If you like."

"Where are you going?"

"I was going down to the village."

They went to the village, but the post-office did not open till eight and Joyce had no stamp.

"I have to post a letter," she told him, breaking away from a discussion on dogs, "and I have no stamp."

He had not mentioned the disaster of the previous evening, but if she thought that he did not connect this early expedition with it she was very behind. Her hazel eyes, her radiant and anxious pallor, were full of secret symbols of distress.

"I can supply the stamp."

He pulled out a pocket-book, gave her the stamp, accepted her three halfpence, and the thing was done. He had had a glimpse of the envelope—"Mrs. Probyn"—and he had a feeling that he had become a fellow-conspirator; he desired nothing less than that.

News spreads in a very remarkable way; our enemies seem always to hear of anything bad that has happened to us, whereas our good moments are unobserved even by our friends. By nine o'clock that morning Miss Carberry, Miss Lane and the most attenuated of the London girls had heard that Joyce

Probyn had only that one evening frock, and that it was unwearable. Mrs. London's ears remained closed. Mrs. Cooper was the one person who had some idea of the situation.

Joyce came down to breakfast in a sage green jumper and fawn-coloured skirt. She was less self-conscious than she might have been, thanks to that early morning walk. At the Londons' breakfast-table people sat where they pleased at any time between nine and ten, and John Gretton, after helping Joyce to porridge, sat down next her.

Miss Carberry and Miss Lane arrived together. A situation had been created, and they were immensely intrigued by it, and this breakfast-table partnership added a little additional venom. They played to each other and to Joyce.

"I do hope your dress wasn't spoilt, Miss Probyn?"

"Most annoying."

For once in her life Joyce fibbed, and any woman of pride would have applauded the fib.

"No, I think it will be all right, thank you. I shall have to send it away."

"To be cleaned? Try Fullers of Bond Street. Of course, as one never wears a dress two nights running——"

"Quite so," said Joyce.

Miss Carberry gave her a sidelong flash of the eyes.

"I'm intrigued to see what the next colour will be like." And she raised her glance to Joyce's hair.

Mr. Gretton remained silent, almost grumpily silent. He made no remarks to anyone and appeared to be in a hurry to finish his breakfast. The party had enlarged itself, and was discussing the arranging for an American tennis tournament for the afternoon. Gretton left them to it; they saw him through one of the windows standing on the terrace and lighting his pipe.

"Not sociable in the early morning!" said Miss Carberry.

Some of the girls drifted out into the garden. There was a Japanese summer-house down by the lake, and here three young women sat in basket chairs, smoked cigarettes and extracted the full humour from the situation.

"It is rather priceless, you know."

"She bluffed you quite nicely, Grace."

"Did she, old thing! But really—I am

intrigued. I am willing to bet any of you that she'll have a headache to-night."

"I might take your bet," drawled the voice of Miss Lane, "and then lend her a dress!"

The suggestion annoyed the two other girls.

"Don't be a beast. Don't spoil the situation."

"She's a stuck-up little prig. Someone has taught her to play the shy game pretty well."

A figure in white, strolling with apparent aimlessness along the grass path between the banks of rhododendrons at the back of the summer-house, had paused there to listen. A minute later it moved on and gravitated towards the loggia at the end of terrace where Mrs. Cooper, with the morning paper lying in her lap, was talking to Joyce Probyn. Gretton joined them with the easy naturalness of a man whose motives were never circuitous.

"I suppose you play tennis?"

Yes, Joyce played tennis.

"I have not touched a racket for years," he said, "and I want a sympathetic partner for this afternoon. Perhaps Mrs. Cooper will suggest one?"

Mrs. Cooper gave him a shy look.

"Well—Miss Probyn?"

He smiled at Joyce.

"Will you?"

"I'm not very good," she said.

Gretton glanced at her feet.

"Would it bore you if we had a knock up? I'm so disgracefully rusty."

She rose at once.

"I'll go and put on my shoes."

Gretton had five minutes. He looked at Mrs. Cooper, and Mrs. Cooper looked at him.

"The child has got only that one dress," he said.

He bit hard on the stem of an empty pipe.

"We have got to do something. I was strolling past that summer-house down there and I heard three sweet young creatures sharpening their claws. Can't you see it all? I suppose—her people——"

Mrs. Cooper raised her shrewd blue eyes.

"A soldier's widow. Just the pension, no more. Quite unspoilt, too—charming."

"I have seen what I wanted," said

THE JADE GREEN DRESS

Gretton with an almost-fierce abruptness. He stood up and kept an eye on the terrace.

"I'm not going to see her humiliated by those. I can guess what's in her mind. She flew down to the village before breakfast and posted a letter to her mother. Perhaps it's for another dress? Perhaps there isn't another dress? She is going to bolt. I can see it in her eyes."

Mrs. Cooper smiled.

"You see a good deal. Most men don't. I have got a car here, you know. Supposing I went for a drive?"

"Yes."

"It is about thirty miles to Reading. I might find something there. Now, Mr. Gretton, if you could keep the child out of the house—even for half an hour."

Gretton looked at her straight and hard.

"You are a sportswoman. Now, this is my affair."

"Nonsense," said the lady; "you can't give the child a dress. I can. I'm a rich old idiot."

"You—you are a perfect dear," he said.

John Gretton and Joyce spent an hour on one of two tennis courts while Mrs. Cooper invaded Joyce's room, possessed herself of the unhappy dress and smuggled it away in a very capacious work-bag. At lunch her absence was hardly noticed. Joyce, who had spent a strangely enchanted morning, despite the problem which haunted her, felt herself closely and almost mockingly observed by three pairs of eyes. Someone asked her if she did not find it very hot playing "singles" in the morning. In her innocence she answered "No."

Miss Carberry glanced at her curiously across the table.

"I—always get a headache if I do that sort of thing."

It was by mere chance that Joyce saw a message pass between Rosamund Lane and Flora London, but its meaning flashed into light within her. These wretches knew! They had guessed; they had even agreed upon what her excuse would be; they would not even allow her to escape unwounded.

Gretton's voice broke in, cool, playful, yet vaguely menacing.

"I won't have my partner worried. You know the powers of suggestion!"

Miss Carberry eyed him with a little pinched smile.

"You had better have some aspirin ready, Mr. Gretton."

"I think I can do better than aspirin," he said.

But Joyce fell into a panic. She knew now that she had been a mortal offence to these young women, and that they were driving her into a corner, and that like male bullies they wanted to see their victim wince or burst into tears. She became obsessed by the absurd idea that the whole house was amused at her frockless condition. And then she rebelled. Her colour rose. She told herself that she would fight back. She would wear that stained dress, come down and defy them.

Play was to begin at three. She dashed upstairs after Gretton had called to her: "Partner, go and rest." She locked her door and went to the wardrobe. Horror! The jade green frock had gone!

She did not know what to do or what to think. Should she ring for the maid and question her? And then it occurred to her that the disappearance of the dress was all part of a malicious jest. She lay down on the bed and tried to think.

At three o'clock she made herself go downstairs. She was white, unstrung. She found John Gretton hanging about on the terrace as though he had been waiting for her.

"Am I late?"

He looked at her with peculiar intentness.

"Are you feeling up to playing?"

"Of course."

She rallied herself; her spirit showed an edge of colour.

"I shan't let you down."

She didn't; she had never played better in her life.

Somewhere about teatime Mrs. Cooper reappeared, sleek and smiling, brimful of happy slyness. She nodded her head at Mr. Gretton, a nod which said, "All's well. I have done it." She turned her eyes to Joyce, a Joyce who was torn between two such contrary things as a man and a mahogany wardrobe. Seizing her opportunity, when the courts were occupied by four other couples, she dashed indoors and up to her room.

Amazing revelation! There were two dresses hanging in the wardrobe, the ill-

fated frock of green and a soft filmy thing of a beautiful warm bronze. She stood and stared at them; and suddenly she burst into tears.

Her world had righted itself; life was not all malice and mockery. She had friends, comrades.

Her eyes were faintly red when she returned to play the final sets, but she was the mistress of a new courage and of a strange and unexpected resolution. She played atrociously, and the more atrociously she played the happier her partner seemed.

"Really, I don't know what's the matter with me."

"I am not complaining," he laughed, putting two balls in her racket, for she was serving; "it's only a game, you know, and yet more than a game—to me."

She blushed, and served another double fault.

When the play was over Joyce went straight up to Mrs. Cooper, who was sitting a little apart.

"Did you put that dress in my wardrobe?"

Mrs. Cooper blinked her blue eyes and nodded.

"My dear—I——"

Joyce bent down and kissed her.

"I want to whisper something. You won't feel hurt if I——"

Mrs. Cooper's face showed a momentary surprise, but when she understood the full significance of the girl's confession she patted Joyce's arm and looked inexplicably proud.

"Yes, do it, my dear, do it. The idea is great."

Being a very wicked and human old woman Mrs. Cooper did not keep Joyce's secret. She told it to Gretton, and into the man's eyes came a shine of exultation and of homage. Men's eyes light up like that when they hear of some act of courage, something done finely and well.

Gretton went straight to Mrs. London.

"I want to ask you a favour," he said.

"I want to take Miss Probyn in to dinner to-night. I'll ask her—in the drawing-room."

Mrs. London could do nothing but acquiesce.

Joyce came down rather late, and perhaps she did it on purpose, and three pairs of watchful and mocking eyes saw that she was wearing the stained green dress. But these young women were surprised by her bearing. She looked radiant, happy, quite unself-conscious. There was something softly triumphant about her, a sensitive spirit which had conquered that most bitter of enemies—ridicule.

And this was not the end. John Gretton made rather a parade of the affair. It was done in the face of the troops standing stiffly to attention, and under the eyes of all.

"May I have the very great pleasure of taking you in to dinner, Miss Probyn?"

Their eyes met and held.

"Yes," she said a little hurriedly; "yes."



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The New Magazine
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*In which Mr. Titus Oaks suffers surprise,
and a very astute young man earns the
right to guard something more precious
than a diamond necklace*

By Warwick Deeping

INTO the broad splash of sunlight between the green palms and the white front of the Hotel Semiramis drove a big closed car. A woman and a man stepped out of it, the woman fat, beaming, opulent; the man rather shrivelled, yellow and bored.

The woman spoke to the chauffeur.

"You can go back home, Waddy."

Her voice had a slight twang; it was an ugly voice—but people were apt to forget the ugliness of Mrs. Titus P. Oaks's voice when they had been overwhelmed and drowned by her vitality.

"Why—this is fine!"

She touched her husband's elbow, and they were about to ascend the steps of the Semiramis when the woman happened to glance towards the tennis court that was shut off by a hedge of wistaria and roses.

"Why—there's Kitty!"

Her voice was so loud and resonant that a fair-haired girl in a light blue jumper and white skirt, who was playing in a mixed four on the hard court, turned and looked over the hedge.

"Hallo!"

She waved her racket, and came to the hedge.

"So glad you have come. Do you mind if I finish this set? We are 5-2 and forty-love, and I don't want to spoil it for the others."

Mrs. Titus Oaks beamed. Her husband stood with his hat in his hand, his glassy, chocolate-coloured eyes quite expressionless behind his rimless pince-nez. He was a dry, reticent, yet smooth person—baffling, colourless. Even when he smiled you did not see a man, but a face, a row of artificial teeth, two glassy eyes behind two pieces of glass.

"Sure, dearie. You finish your game; Mr. Oaks and I will sit on the terrace."

"I have ordered tea," said the English girl; "such a tea!"

So Mr. and Mrs. Titus P. Oaks of Detroit, or somewhere in U.S.A., sat in two basket chairs on the terrace of the Semiramis Hotel and watched Kitty Carrington finish her set. The Americans were interested in Kitty; they were cultivating Kitty—this rather irresponsible and thoroughly delightful young woman with her audacious head of untamable yellow hair, her up-to-dateness, and her money. She was rather like a reckless, yellow kitten—this only daughter of Stephen Carrington, who had died and left her a great fortune. Kitty was very modern and quite fearless.

"I can look after myself, thank you." That was her motto.

Mrs. Oaks continued to beam. She shone like the sun; for when the sun shines people are apt to think that there are no clouds about.

"Ain't she pretty," she observed.

Her husband was sitting in his chair like a yellow and imperturbable Chinese.

"Guess she's got the gold band on. And she'll make me eat too many cakes for tea!"

When Kitty arrived Mrs. Oaks overflowed with motherly enthusiasm.

"My dear, you look a reg'lar peach. Now sit right down and rest."

Kitty smiled at the fat woman, and took the chair that Mr. Oaks provided for her. She had known these Americans a month, and she liked them very well, finding them refreshing after the English "antiques" at the Semiramis, for a great part of Semiramis disapproved of Kitty, of her hair, of her independence, of her originality, of her boyish attitude towards life. "A chit of a girl wandering about Europe without a chaperone. My dear, what are we coming to?" These Americans did not look at her as though she were some rather shocking creature who wore dresses that were too pretty and too brief.

SCARLET

"I've ordered chocolate éclairs, lots of them."

Mr. Oaks's chocolate eyes gave a flat gleam.

"You would make me eat the family diamonds," he laughed.

"Titus, do be careful. There's too much talk about your joolry, my dear."

"I like it," said Kitty; "pretty things are made to be worn and not locked up in banks. Where on earth is that waiter?"

She jumped up and went in search of the tea waiter, who seemed lost in meditation at the far end of the terrace. The two Americans bent slightly towards each other, and the man said something to the woman, hardly moving his lips—his face as blank as the face of a ventriloquist. His wife smoothed her dress with her fat, heavily ringed hands, and lay back comfortably in her chair.

"The Masked Ball. She must go to it. I'll fix it this afternoon."

"Tell her——"

Mrs. Oaks raised her eyebrows, and her husband sat back in his chair. Kitty was returning.

"That waiter must either be in love or a Bolshevik. He asked me if we wanted toasted buns!"

"My! These French are queer. They think all the people who come from the States want to drink cold water all night and all day."

"And in England they think you say 'Gee-whiz' to everything."

"Tickled to death," said Mr. Oaks. "I guess one toasted bun would do it to me."

The detached waiter arrived with the tea and set it down as though the carrying and ordering of the tea-trays was an interlude in a life of deep, metaphysical meditation. Kitty poured out—she and Mrs. Oaks chatting like old friends, while Mr. Oaks stared glassily into space—and when he smiled it was as though some prompting spirit in him pulled a string. Kitty thought him so quiet and kind and restful; he appeared to adore his wife; Kitty had heard that all American men were old and tired at fifty and that they adored their wives.

"Now—you wouldn't think Mr. Oaks could dance, would you, dearie?"

"He might," said Kitty roguishly, "if he were excused chocolate éclairs and buns."

"Listen to that, Titus. Say—we must

all go to the Masked Ball at the Casino. I was going to ask you, dearie, to come with us."

"I'd be tickled to death, Mrs. Oaks."

Mrs. Oaks pretended to be shocked.

"You must not say such things. Think of my responsibilities, looking after the prettiest girl in Europe with a twenty-thousand-dollar necklace hanging round her neck. My dear, you must give out that they are paste."

"Well, so they are! You can tell everybody so. But, I say, what are we going to wear?"

A man can safely go to sleep when two women begin discussing dress, and Mr. Titus Oaks, having asked permission to smoke, lit a very black cigar and hid himself in smoke and silence. Mr. Oaks was not a man whose eyes looked upwards; he was no star-gazer, his glance went shrewdly along the level earth, and yet had he looked upwards at the windows of the Hôtel du Paris he might have noticed that the group to which he belonged was of some interest to another man. The east windows of the Hôtel du Paris overlooked the terrace and garden of the Semiramis, and two windows on each storey had little stone balconies jutting out from them. A man had brought a chair out on to one of the balconies. He was reading, but most of the time his eyes were looking down over the top of his book at the group on the Semiramis' terrace. Now and again he brought a pair of field-glasses into play. He was a tall man of about thirty, with one of those darkly humorous faces that show sudden flashes of laughter, white teeth, shrewd little wrinkles at the corners of the eyes; but this afternoon there was no laughter in him. He looked serious, almost grim.

"Those Yanks!"

The man of the balcony had watched Kitty Carrington for many days, and his watching of her had compelled him to observe her growing intimacy with Mr. and Mrs. Titus P. Oaks. That he did not like these Americans was obvious—his mistrust of them was not equally obvious—but it was there. He had nicknamed them the Milk-Cow and the Mummy. Kitty was just Kitty, a frank, rather too trustful, and self-confident young woman who feared nothing and no one, not even Mrs. Grundy.

The man of the balcony knew that in this seedy and greedy world seedy and greedy people will do many dirty things, and to Mr. Robert Scarlet these Americans were not quite clean. It was an instinctive mistrust—the sensing of some vague but unpleasant effluvia. When the Oaks rose to go the man of the balcony disappeared through the window, and two minutes later the Americans, in walking down the steep road from the Semiramis, passed a tall Englishman mooching up the hill with an air of English apathy. "Mooching" exactly expressed Mr. Scarlet's movements. There appeared to be no snap in him; he was chewed string, but the English aristocrat is a unique product. No man can look more innocuous, and be more dangerous—when he wishes.

Mr. Robert Scarlet turned and followed the Americans to their villa. It was a square, white house with green shutters, standing by itself upon the side of a hill, and almost hidden by pines, ilexes and olive trees. The name "Villa Laura" was painted on the two stone gate pillars.

Robert Scarlet explored the surroundings of the Villa Laura. His investigations led him to discover a *chaume* or thatched summer-house built within five yards of the garden wall, and by looking over the wall he could see the foot-rest of a lounge chair, a couple of periodicals lying on the ground, and the stumps of several dead cigars.

"They sit out here," he thought.

Scarlet's side of the wall was wild and rocky hillside covered with cistus and tree-heath, and he selected a likely spot in the thick of a clump of breast-high heather, and sat down and waited. There is virtue in patience, even though a man loses his dinner and hears nothing, but Mr. Scarlet was not discouraged.

"What about the post *petit déjeuner* hour?" he thought.

He was there next morning with his long legs drawn up and his knees tucked under his chin. He heard footsteps, the rustling of paper, the sound of regular and practised expectoration. He could even smell the cigar.

"That's the Mummy! Now—the Milk-Cow."

There were more footsteps, the creaking of a basket chair, more rustling of paper.

"Darby and Joan," he thought.

One may not overhear the planning of villainies, but one may feel the near presence of them—yet Mr. Robert Scarlet did gather several singular remarks.

"She'll come to that ball for sure?" said the man's voice.

"I'll fix her for that," lowed the Milk-Cow.

There was more rustling of paper, more expectoration.

"Do you think she'll wear them?"

"My! The little fool is vain enough for anything. Tell her not to and she'll do it, sure, just for sheer cussedness."

"It will be easy," said the man, "dead easy."

Mr. Scarlet heard no more that was of any significance, but he sat there till Mr. and Mrs. Titus P. Oaks left the *chaume*. The wise type of Englishman does not hustle. Linen can be better washed in the old-fashioned way; steam laundry methods are not ideal.

* * * * *

It was the first *bal masqué* since the war, and the Casino ball-room was like a huge basket into which had been poured hundreds of bright-coloured flowers. But these flowers breathed and moved and laughed and flirted, with a glimmer of eyes behind the blank vizards. The dresses were superb, both in conception and in colour; there were two orchestras and the music was exquisite.

One man did not dance. He wore the dress of a pierrot, but the colour of it was scarlet. A very tall man, he leant against the balustrade that separated the dancing floor from the boxes, and watched this most fascinating of crowds as though he was looking for one particular dancer. Girls, dancing together, for the men were scarce, glanced at him provokingly, sometimes a little resentfully. This tall man looked as though he could dance.

He remained peculiarly motionless, and always in the same place. Once he gave a quick turn of the head. He had seen something, a girl in a dress of sea-green gauze, and wearing a pierrette hat on her amber-coloured hair. She had a necklace of diamonds round her throat.

"If that's not Kitty—I'm not myself."

Her partner was a shortish, square-built man dressed as a Red Indian, who danced with the bent knees and flat feet of a previous generation, but the Red Pierrot was not interested in the man. He

watched the girl's dancing, her beautiful quick feet, and the delightful and slightly audacious poise of her head and body.

"Yes, it's Kitty!" he thought. "There is only one woman who can dance like that! That little flick of the right heel, and that chin!"

For the first time he moved. When the dance was over he followed them out. He waited his chance; the Red Indian had gone for a couple of cocktails; when he returned the Green Pierrette had disappeared.

The man looked annoyed, puzzled. He sat down at the little table—waited, fidgeted—and then did a queer thing. He managed to upset one of the glasses, and then smiled at his own clumsiness. A woman joined him; she was dressed as a Dutch girl, and since she was fat she had been able to dispense with the additional petticoats. They talked together; the Red Indian kept looking about the great colonaded room. He seemed annoyed about something.

Another dance had begun, and one of the orchestras was playing "Sand Dunes." The Scarlet Pierrot was bending over the girl in green; he had not spoken a word; they began to dance.

People watched them. Women in the boxes pointed them out to each other, for the Scarlet Pierrot was one of the swift, quietly gliding dancers who move like light even in a clumsy crowd.

"The best couple in the room."

"Yes. They are quite beautiful to watch."

For the first minute or so the girl had given herself up to the delight of moving to music with such a partner, and then her eyes looked up at him with gradual surprise behind her mask. Neither of them had spoken. They were too delighted with the music and with each other.

Suddenly she uttered a little exclamation.

"Who taught you that?"

He knew very well what she meant, but he pretended not to understand.

"What, mademoiselle?"

"The step you did just now."

He smiled.

"I taught it myself. Don't you like it?"

She did not reply. She seemed perplexed, troubled.

When the dance was over she thanked

him and asked to be taken back to her friends, and he bowed and obeyed her.

"My friends are a Dutch woman and a Red Indian."

"Mr. and Mrs. Titus P. Oaks."

She turned on him sharply.

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. I guessed. Please may I have another dance, and particularly the dance before supper?"

"No," she said; and then: "Well—perhaps."

He bent slightly towards her.

"I'm grateful, very grateful. I have my reasons, you know, and your dancing is a dream."

They found the Red Indian and the Dutch lady still sitting at one of the little round tables, and the Scarlet Pierrot bowed to them all and went his way.

"Who is the man, dearie? I hope he is a gentleman. One can't be too careful in such a crowd."

Kitty asked a passing waiter to bring her an ice.

"I don't know him from Adam," she said; "but he is the best partner I have had for a year."

To Kitty the next four dances were formal affairs, uninspired interludes passed with Napoleon I., a chef, Nero, and a polar bear. She noticed that the Scarlet Pierrot had resumed his place by the balustrade, and that he danced with no one else. She felt his eyes watching her; they seemed to follow her through all the interweavings of those many and bright figures.

"It can't be," she thought, "and yet—that step and the voice—and his tallness—"

She was conscious of a little thrill of excitement when he came to her for the next dance. It was a waltz. She had begun to dream when his voice interrupted her dreaming.

"Are you having supper with those people?"

"You mean the Oaks?"

"Yes."

She looked at his eyes.

"Of course."

"What is the number of your table?"

"Twenty-seven, I believe."

The crowd was growing merry and irresponsible, and the Scarlet Pierrot had to shepherd his partner out of a knot of interlocked, laughing maskers. Someone

trod on Kitty's foot, and she gave a little cry of pain and annoyance.

"I'm so sorry," said her partner; "shall we sit it out? All the dowagers have taken the floor. Fat women have heavy feet."

"Oh, no—please. I'm enjoying it."

"So am I. Do you mind if I tell you something?"

She looked at him a little shyly.

"Well?"

"You really ought not to wear that necklace at a rag like this."

He saw her colour.

"Thank you, I can look after myself very well."

"I know," he said, "but—all the same—the world is full of sharks."

She was a little piqued, but the mood was not very serious, and when he came to her for the supper dance she was full of exquisite curiosity. They would unmask at the end of this dance; moreover, it was the great revel of the evening. The crowd grew happily mad. Showers of confetti began to fly, serpentines, coloured balls, flowers. Some of the dancers were wound round with loop upon loop of coloured paper; it clung round white throats and slim ankles. Everybody laughed; many sang. Kitty's hair was full of confetti; the men who pelted her threw their homage.

"What a rag!"

He was gay but protective, shielding her with his tall figure.

"I believe I know who you are," she said.

"Do you!" he laughed. "Then come and make sure."

The spirit of mischief moved her. She slipped away from him suddenly and darted into the crowd. He gave chase, and the pursuit ended in a corner of one of the boxes; he leant over the balustrade and held her challenged.

"Unmask, lady, unmask!"

"You—first."

"No, we will do it together. Now!"

He reached for her left hand, and they removed the black masks and looked into each other's eyes.

"Bob! You!"

"Yes, poor me," he said. "The superfluous man!"

"But I told you not to——"

"Exactly. But I could not resign myself to being superfluous."

She laughed, her eyes gave a little

glimmer of mischief; she was less angry with him than she could have believed. And then a loud voice with an American twang sawed the air in between them, and Mrs. Titus P. Oaks intervened.

"Dearie, I have been looking for you everywhere. Poor dear Titus wants his supper."

The Milk Cow looked dourly at Mr. Robert Scarlet. Kitty introduced him.

"Mr. Scarlet—know Mrs. Titus Oaks. I think that is the American way to do it!"

The Scarlet Pierrot bowed.

"Delighted," he drawled; "may I have a dance—presently?"

"I don't dance," said the lady, and carried Kitty off.

Supper was a very merry affair, a feast of harmless fooling—a battle of table against table, of party against party. You selected the girl who charmed you most, and between the eating of salmon mayonnaise and chicken and the drinking of champagne, you lobbed flowers or coloured balls at the lady who pleased you: Mr. Robert Scarlet—having conveyed a hundred-franc note to the *maitre d'hôtel*—was provided with a little table at the bottom of a pillar and at no great distance from table twenty-seven. He had a fairly good view of Kitty and her Americans.

The fun became fast and strenuous. Flowers and serpentines flew; there were little shrieks of laughter, a hiding of pretty faces behind masks. Every now and again the orchestra struck up a dance, and half the crowd flowed away from the tables to the dancing floor beyond the supper enclosure, and fox-trotted and waltzed. At her table Kitty was being pelted unmercifully, and the Scarlet Pierrot bombarded her with flowers. She retaliated with great spirit. Even the Mummy seemed inspired to throw flowers and coloured balls at everyone in the neighbourhood.

When a man is in love he has four eyes and sees everything, especially when the woman he loves is in danger, and Bob Scarlet saw something that brought him to his feet. The great room was in a delightful uproar; the fun and the fooling had flared up to a climax. Napoleon I. was standing on a chair singing the "Marseillaise," the Polar Bear was crawling about among the tables "woofing" at

everyone; on another table a Mephistopheles had perched himself and was "conducting." Napoleon's solo with a long roll of bread for a baton. Someone had just thrown a bunch of flowers at Kitty; they had fallen beside her chair, and she was stooping to pick them up. Mr. Titus Oaks, as though conceiving some subtle jest, leaned over and refilled her champagne glass, and covered it with a pink paper cap.

The Scarlet Pierrot walked to table twenty-seven. He was laughing and waving his arms.

"Ladies and gentlemen, *messieurs et mesdames*, silence, please."

His voice seemed huge; everybody turned and looked at him.

"I am going to sell a glass of wine for the orphans of the war. *Voilà!* The glass and the wine of a very charming lady."

- He leant over quickly, removed the pink paper cap, picked up Kitty's glass and held it at arm's length.

"*Voilà!* What bids, ladies and gentlemen?"

He looked at Mr. Titus Oaks, and something very strange seemed to have happened to the American. His face looked flat and frightened.

"What bids, gentlemen?"

A dozen men were standing.

"Fifty francs."

"A hundred francs."

"Two hundred francs."

Bob Scarlet glanced at Mr. Titus P. Oaks.

"Two hundred francs I am bid. This

The Scarlet Pierrot carried on that auction until the glass of wine was knocked down to Mr. Titus P. Oaks



unique glass of champagne to be drunk by the highest bidder."

Mrs. Oaks kicked her husband under the table. He jumped up like a figure shot up by a spring.

"Two hundred and fifty francs."

"Three hundred francs."

"Four hundred francs."

The Scarlet Pierrot carried on that auction until the glass of wine was knocked down to Mr. Titus P. Oaks for the sum of eighteen hundred francs.

The American produced a wad of notes from the folds of his dress.

"Stand up on your chair, sir, please."

His eyes seemed to fascinate Mr. Oaks. The American got up on his chair.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the happy and gallant Tiddidatha has won this glass of bubbly. Behold him drink it."

And Mr. Oaks drank it, every drop of it, though his hand seemed a little shaky with excitement.

Kitty stood up and curtsied to him.

"You are a dear."

Scarlet pounced and carried her off to dance.

"He's not a dear," he said. "he's an absolute scoundrel. Come along, let's dance."

But she was shocked.

"Bob, how dare you! Mr. Oaks and his wife are friends of mine."

He looked down at her with a serious, devoted smile.

"Kitty, you are much too generous and trustful. Now I'll make a prophesy. You will see nothing more of these dear American friends; they will disappear, and in a great hurry."

She had never seen him so serious in spite of his smile.

"Bob, what do you mean?"

He hesitated and then offered her his arm.

"Let's go and sit down."

He led her to a large recess fitted up as a lounge, its entrance screened with palms just within the glass doors of the Casino rooms. There was an unoccupied settee here with its back to the palms, and by holding aside one of the big leaves Scarlet was able to keep the colonnade and the entrance doors in view.

"I think we may see something."

Kitty was very serious now. Her fingers went suddenly to her diamond necklace. Scarlet saw the gesture and nodded.

"Yes, that."

"Bob, you don't mean——"

"I do," he said; "look!"

A group of three people was moving down the colonnade to the entrance, a woman and two men. Mrs. Titus P. Oaks and an attendant were supporting Mr.

Oaks, who was holding a handkerchief to his mouth with one hand and pressing the other hand into his body. Even under the artificial tan of his face a chalky pallor was visible.

The attendant was protesting.

"I will call a doctor for monsieur."

"No, no," said the woman; "it is nothing. The wine has upset my husband. Get us a carriage or a taxi."

They disappeared through the glass doors, and Bob Scarlet turned to Kitty.

"Little girl, if I were a clever rogue and planning some villainy, I should choose a public place and a public occasion. That was Mr. Titus P. Oaks's idea. He wanted that necklace of yours, and one of the safest places in which to commit a robbery is in the thick of a joyous crowd."

"But how? And why was he taken ill?"

"Because I made him drink your wine. The beastly scoundrel had drugged it. I saw him do the trick, and very cleverly he did it. I don't suppose the stuff was dangerous, but it would have made you ghastly ill. There would have been a commotion. Those two dear creatures would have fussed over you like a father and mother and seized the chance to quietly purloin your necklace. And afterwards they would have been the first to notice that it was missing, and would have raised a devil of a dust. That is my reading of it, O queen."

She looked at him with her frank blue eyes.

"Bob, how clever you are!"

"Oh, well—you know," he said, "certain things make one rather intelligent. I did not want to be quite superfluous."

She put her hands to her throat and unfastened the necklace.

"Bob, keep it for me, please."

"Certainly," he said; "but may I remind you, O queen, that I want to keep something more valuable than a diamond necklace."



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Thomas

By Warwick Deeping

"Thomas, the naive, demure, sedate Thomas, drove him to the reglorified mansion, and nearly contrived to lift his suit case out of the car.

"No, you don't," he said almost viciously.

"And Mrs. Odgers reproved Thomas for being forward and trying to fuss."



HIS tale begins with the insolence of Perkins, Perkins the chauffeur, who stood on the doorstep of No. 3, Newmarket Place, W., at ten minutes after midnight, and insulted the breadth of Mrs. Gadsby Odgers' back.

"Camden Tarn, that's your ticket, and a pub. with plenty of coloured bottles an' a

tilled floor an' a thruppenny 'bitter'; or Sarthend an' a nine-penny tea wiv shrimps. What price a few more diamonds!"

Perkins departed, after jamming the big Swonk-Mullinger into the garage, and putting the speedometer out of action by introducing it to the metal end of the Turkey carpet-covered foot-warmer.

At breakfast Mrs. Gadsby Odgers had one of her purple moods.

"A lady chaffer, that's what we want, Percy, a lady in a nice blue uniform like one of them flying gels. It's smart. You send me one along on appro. I'll fix her."

Gadsby Odgers looked at his wife and grunted. He was a square man with a white jowl, and hands like spades, and he had made a very great deal of money. Money brings social responsibility, and Odgers' imagination was limited, getting no further than check suits, spats, the biggest car that could be bought, champagne, a gold cigar-case and the most flagrant of green Homburg hats. His wife and the "girls" had taken control of the social scheme.

They meant to be very smart and exclusive. "Pa had the money, and if money couldn't do things what use had the war been, anyway?" Gadsby Odgers, Esq., had bought "Bassets," in Surrey, and rented No. 3, Newmarket Place. There was to be a moor in Scotland and a villa on the Riviera. The Misses Odgers knew all that the journals for gentlewomen could tell them, and Ma approved.

Two days later Thomas arrived, a slim girl in brown coat and skirt and a little brown hat covering a mass of light brown hair. There was demureness about her that could not wholly quell the humour in her china blue eyes.

"The old woman wants to see you in the library," said the rather amused parlour-maid with a friendly smirk; "you stand up to her, that's my tip."

Thomas ascended to the library and had her first glimpse of Mrs. Gadsby Odgers. She found a very fat woman with a badly powdered, purple face sitting in an armchair and allowing a Pekinese to wallow in the ocean of her lap. Mrs. Odgers' hair was a messy mass of dubious gold, stuck about with diamond combs, and all frizzed over the forehead. She wore rimless pince-nez. Her dress was like a pyrotechnic display, for she had a strange taste for covering her enormousness with plaid scarves and fichus, and any gaudy falderals that could be carried. Her fingers were stuffed into a dozen rings. Thomas noticed that all this mass of flesh and fashion had to poise itself on the three-inch Louis heels of a pair of

Thomas

brocade shoes, from which two salmon-coloured ankles bulged like the weird fruit of some exotic plant. Mrs. Gadsby Odgers' stare began at Thomas' little hat and ended at her tan shoes.

"So you're the gel Odgers, Esq., has seen about?"

"Yes."

"You will call me 'ma'am,'"

"Yes, madam."

The sensitive, mischievous mouth tightened a little.

"And what's your name?"

"Thomas, Phoebe Thomas."

"You don't look very strong."

"O, I am quite strong, madam."

"What references?"

"I showed them to Mr. Odgers. I drove for Sir Lionel Philips for about ten months, and then for Lord Totness."

The fat woman nodded solemnly, feeling impressed and having no intention of showing it.

"What I expect of you, Thomas, is respectability. You 'ave to try and be 'ave like a lady."

"Yes, madam,"

"You must always call my 'usband 'sir.'"

"Yes, madam."

"You musn't speak unless you're spoken to, and you must be perlit to the young ladies."

"Of course, madam."

"You can 'ave your meals in the 'ousekeeper's room, and you can 'ave a bedroom in the 'ouse. You've got to dress in blue; Odgers, Esq., will supply the uniform. And I don't like your hair done like that, it looks messy."

"I'm sorry, madam, but it grows that way. I'll see what can be done."

"That's all, Thomas. And tell Bates to bring up the dog's lunch."

Thomas entered upon her duties with the good temper of a girl who has made up her mind to be amused. She handled the big Swonk-Mullinger with a skill that equalled Perkins' insolence, and she was much more pleasant to look at. She began by being delighted with the

Gadsby Odgers, for they were so rankly and unutterably offensive that she could hardly believe that they were true. The type was new to her, and she studied it with serene and enigmatic composure.

"Open the door, Thomas."

Such omissions and such forgetfulnesses had to be remedied, and Miss Flo Odgers had a nice way with servants. The Misses Odgers were blond young women with thin lips and an air of supercilious aloofness. Ma had caused them to react. Thomas did not exist for them save to open doors, spread rugs, and wait outside theatres and restaurants.

They hated each other like a couple of rival cats, but the gentlemen in khaki who were crowded regularly into the big car heard them talk to each other like angels fashioned in Bond Street.

But those state, family loadings up were the great affairs. First there was Mrs. Gadsby Odgers to be got on board, huge, purple and prodigiously opulent. Gadsby, Esq., followed, fur-coated and rather oppressed; Toutou preceded the "young ladies"; some odd thing in khaki was generally attached, a thing that should have worn violet socks and said "Excuse my glove" and "Pleased to meet you." Then there were the rugs, the foot-warmer, a box of chocolates, Mrs. Odgers' leather and gold bag that always got left behind in the house, a hot-water bottle in a pink plush cover to help Toutou to warm Mrs. Gadsby Odgers' lap. The whole creation formed a veritable purple patch, and the Swonk-Mullinger, painted a canary yellow, snoozed through the park and round about Mayfair with the air of a car whose life was a beatitude.

The Gadsby Odgers always did a great deal of shopping. It was part of the pageant. There was a theatre too and a supper or something nearly every night. Thomas was kept waiting about till all hours, and nobody suggested that she was

By Warwick Deeping

tired or might like any food. She held her place in long queues of private cars and taxis, chattered with other drivers, got sleepy, and sometimes very cold, and was generally snapped at and worried during the loading up. The yellow Swonk-Mullinger was always blocking the traffic, to the annoyance of theatre commissionaires and policemen.

"Now then, move on, Miss."

"Number 90."

"Move on that yellow car."

And Mrs. Gadsby Odgers would be heaving and exclaiming in that wheezy voice of hers:

"Tell the man to mind 'is own business, Percy. I won't be 'urried for a lot of cheap taxis. You ain't got the rug rarnd me, girl. Where's Toutou?"

"Move on, miss."

"Shut the door, Thomas, and mind my skirt."

That sort of thing happened nearly every evening.

It became apparent in due course that the Gadsby Odgers had ambitions. Thomas picked up stray hints and suggestions. A certain rather hectic lady, Mrs. Pentherston Atlee, became attached, and Mrs. Atlee knew people who knew other people who were in Debrett. There were expeditions to charity concerts and other suggestive functions. The Misses Odgers walked daily in the park. Thomas even heard them chatting about Lord This and Lord That. These flowers had not been gathered, but their perfume was in the air.

Meanwhile Bassets, that most serene and mellow of ancient houses, had been munitionised, and the Gadsby Odgers were prepared to go down to court the "county." Thomas took Odgers, Esq., and his daughters on a flying visit. Bassets was to have a state opening two weeks later.

Thomas had known Bassets before the war, but the renovations surprised her. There was a sort of Japanese boathouse beside the lake, with a gondola moored to it, and a

white wooden kiosk had been built on the island that had been a mass of rhododendrons.

The Gadsby Odgers got off and admired the kiosk.

"That strikes the eye, don't it?" said Pa, "though it ought to have a gold top to it, somehow. I wonder if they've got the swans."

They strolled up the great avenue, and Thomas followed slowly with the car. She noticed that a golf course had been laid out in the park, and that what looked like a brick pagoda had been slapped up against the finest group of Scotch firs. Her first glimpse of the house appalled her. A new wing with a confectionery turret had been added in prawn-coloured brickwork. The old Italian garden had been swept away, and in its place there were fountains and pergolas and little twisting finicky bits of rock garden, statues, and gaudy little blue and yellow conifers dotted about everywhere. She counted three summerhouses and a sort of glass chalet. A huge new garage smothered the old red brick stables. The pleasure had become one great lawn, and iron standards and wire netting showed that it was destined for tennis. The balustrade of the old terrace had lost its quaint figures and classic urns, and in their place were eight-inch shell cases painted blue and white.

"Thomas, bring the chocolates."

Thomas brought them. Gadsby Odgers, Esq., was standing with his hands in his pockets, a little hot and exultant.

"My idea, that. Not bad, eh? Sort of 'istoric touch, eh, Thomas?"

"Which, sir?"

"Why, them shell cases. Sort of sign of the new haristoracy, what? You can see money's been spent, can't you, Thomas?"

"Yes, I can see that, sir."

"Flo?"

"Yes, Pa."

"We ought to 'ave 'ad a rink somewhere. That there ballroom I built might do."

Thomas

"Certainly not, Pa," said Miss Odgers.

"Well, I was only suggestin', wasn't I?"

They went in and surveyed the house, being met on the terrace by a very polite and secretly cynical master of affairs, and Thomas accompanied them, carrying the chocolates. The Gadsby Odgers had splashed gilding everywhere. Even the Jacobean hall and the long gallery had been enamelled white, and the panels picked out with gilding. The new ballroom was like a room in a London restaurant, all mirrors and white paint and gold. The "organ room" or "all of musio" as Mr. Odgers called it, had inspired him with further "historic touches." A big Union Jack, with a bulldog beneath it, had been painted across the organ pipes.

"There's your patriotic touch, Thomas. Shows you that patriotism pays."

A fortnight later the Gadsby Odgers family left 3, Newmarket Place for Bassets, travelling by car. Mrs. Pentherston Atlee was to have accompanied them to tweet discreet directions, but she was in bed with "flu," and the Odgers had to face the world alone.

The Misses Odgers appeared quite confident.

"We'll wake them up in the country, Pa. They won't know themselves in six months."

They had only to advertise the new show at Bassets, and the old house would resemble the most ultra modern and stylish "hydropathic."

On the way down they had an adventure, an adventure that was to exert a fateful influence on the rustic destinies of the Odgers family. In the wilds of the chalk country they came across a little grey two-seater car with its front wheels in the ditch. A tall and rather swarthy man of about thirty-five was standing beside it, one hand hanging rather helplessly, the other deep in his trouser pocket.

"Thomas."

"Yes, madam."

"What are you stopping for? We shall be late for lunch."

"I thought we might help, madam."

She was the autocrat of the moment, for she and the swarthy man had recognised each other, and the Swonk-Mullinger drew up at the side of the road. The stranded one strolled forward, raised his hat, and addressed Gadsby Odgers.

"Sorry to stop you, but I have had a bit of a smash."

Mrs. Odgers, reclining à la duchesse, with Toutou in her lap, wheezed patronage.

"These little cars must be a noosance. We're in a 'urry. Odgers, Esq., has a lunch party at Bassets."

The stranger smiled, one of those interior, happy smiles.

"I'm a neighbour of yours, then, Coverdale of Moorcroft Hall."

There was a little sensation in the Odgers' car. Miss Flo kicked her mother under the rug.

"Sir Philip Coverdale?"

"Yes."

The yellow Swonk-Mullinger became a thing of oil and polish. Even Toutou was incommoded by an earthquake, and had to be picked up off the floor.

"Pleased to know you, Sir Philip Coverdale. My daughters, Flora and Beatie. Thomas, where's Thomas?"

"I think your chauffeuse has gone to look at my car."

Odgers showed the true spirit of a captain of industry.

"I'll fix that in an hour, Sir Philip. Send a lorry for it, and a dozen men. Guess we can raise that at Bassets."

"You are very kind."

He walked back to where Thomas stood in her blue uniform, looking at the derelict two-seater. She saw him coming, and her grey eyes glanced at him with oblique shyness. Her colour too was a shade richer, and Coverdale noticed it.

"Phoebe."

By Warwick Deeping

"Well?"

"What are you doing here driving these swine?"

"I selected the post myself, Phil; it's an education. Don't you remember going to the Zoo to see the lions feed and all that?"

"I do."

"This is part of my Zoo. But why didn't you write and tell me you were home?"

He stood very close to her, and looked at nothing but her face.

"I only left Egypt two weeks ago. I had written to you at Latimer."

"It hasn't reached me yet. But what are we going to do with this car of yours?"

"That's not the question. Who is going to drive that damned yellow panttechnicon to Bassets, because you're not?"

"O, but I am."

"Very well, I shall get invited to the house party."

Her eyes lit up with sudden delight.

"O, do, Phil; it's immense. But I'm afraid you'll get peeved. You see, I'm only a servant, and I meal in the housekeeper's room, and get told off."

"I'm joining the party," he said suddenly, "if I have to kiss that damned Chinese dog."

There had been a hurried debate in the Swonk-Mullinger. Ma had been told that Sir Philip must be invited to lunch. Ma herself had a wild idea of asking him to stay the week-end. And then he appeared, stately and charming, and appealed to their pity. He was carrying a brown leather suit case, and Miss Odgers called Thomas's attention to it.

"Ere, Thomas, take Sir Philip's luggage."

"I can manage it myself, thank you, but if you could give me a lift, I was going to put up at The George at Lingwood. My place is being decorated."

Mrs. Gadsby Odgers nudged her husband.

"I know them country pubs.

Why, there's Bassets all ready and waiting, Sir Philip."

"Liberty 'All, Sir Philip. Better than the Cecil. We'll be proud. What's the matter with Bassets, anyway?"

And then the miraculous thing happened. Sir Philip Coverdale accepted, and accepted with such charming frankness that the Misses Odgers prepared to hate each other as they had never hated each other before.

Thomas, the naïve, demure, sedate Thomas drove him to the reglorified mansion, and nearly contrived to lift his suit case out of the car.

"No, you don't," he said almost viciously.

And Mrs. Odgers reproved Thomas for being forward and trying to fuss.

The descent of a real, live baronet upon Bassets led to a very serious family conference. The Misses Odgers insisted on going it, for that house party needed careful reconsideration.

"Mr. Shufflebottom?"

"Strike him out, Ma."

"And Augustus Sankey? Such a breeze of a boy."

"He's vulgar. Turn him down."

"Then the Blobb girls?"

The Blobb girls were dropped. The house party was creamed down to Lieut. Horace Courtledge, the Rev. Peter Lucky, 2nd Lieut. Babelin, and Captain Jack. Captain Jack was Captain John Gadsby Odgers, R.A.S.C., who was due home on leave on the morrow.

"You'll have to wire the rest of them, Ma. Say you're ill and the party is off."

The wires were sent, and the girls rushed off to consider their wardrobes.

That house party speedily suppressed Coverdale's sense of humour. He began by trying to regard it as a comedy, but by the morning of the Sabbath he was politely and dangerously savage.

The temporary gentlemen arrived on Saturday, the two subalterns

Thomas

fully primed to be "fresh" with the Odgers' girls, but from the very first their noses were flatter than Toutou's. Brother Jack did not count. He was an oily young savage in the horriest of pink riding-breeches and a soft cap well on the back of his head; a shrewd young man who liked his buttons bright when he clinked his spurs to the delight of French shop girls and credulous W.A.A.C.s at the base.

Coverdale found himself indispensable, and the Misses Odgers seemed afraid that he would be bored. They were such kittens, and so helpless.

Flora wanted to learn golf. She inveigled the baronet out on to the new park links, and nearly got lost with him looking for a ball in the bracken, but her sister soon found them.

"How absurd. It's too hot, and heat never did suit you, Flo, dear. I'm sure Sir Philip would like to go on the lake."

So he went on the lake with Beatie, and paddled the gondola about, and sat in the white kiosk, and wondered why she wore salmon-coloured stockings. Then of course she must try to handle the gondola, and couldn't, and her helplessness meant giggles and engaging appeals to the great man.

"O, Sir Philip. How do you do it? You're so clever. It's so wobbly it makes me want to scream."

He was very polite, and he got her safely harboured in the Japanese boathouse, but she had to be helped ashore.

"Wasn't it lovely? I think it would be so nice by moonlight."

Coverdale began to wonder whether her sister would suggest golf by moonlight.

The next incident annoyed him very seriously. They met the Swonk-Mullinger in the drive; Thomas driving, and Captain Jack playing the fascinating soldier in the front seat beside her. His annoyance was rendered sardonic by Miss Beatie's intimate remark:

"I wish the Captain wouldn't do that."

"Do what?"

"Flirt with servants. It's horrid. I suppose it's the war, Sir Philip? He's quite a nice boy, really."

"Yes, put it down to the war."

He was rather silent during lunch. The Ulysses in him was meditating. And Captain Jack had not returned. The Swonk-Mullinger rolled up to the house about tea-time, and Coverdale noticed that the young Odgers was in one of the back seats. Thomas looked enigmatic, cold as some Greek head in the Vatican.

Sir Philip left his deck chair and strolled round to the garage. He found Thomas examining a cut in one of the front tyres.

"Phoebe."

She looked slightly flushed, and there was a glitter in her eyes.

"The humour of it is wearing thin, Phil."

"Who ordered you to take that cad out?"

"He did, dear man. I have driven Tommies, Phil, dozens of them, and the boys behaved like bricks to me. But that—that— He was trying to kiss me at the end of half an hour, and making suggestions about an hotel at Brighton. I'm giving notice."

She laughed half angrily, but Coverdale did not laugh.

"This is my affair," he said, "and I think I see a new humour in it. Have you any clothes down here?"

"Clothes?"

"Yes, anything besides that confounded blue uniform?"

"It's possible. One evening frock, one tennis frock, one tweed coat and skirt."

"That settles it. I'm going to prepare my attack."

He opened his offensive by taking Mrs. Odgers to see the new rose garden.

"May I make a suggestion, Mrs. Odgers?"

"Certainly, Sir Philip. I'm a woman with a h'open mind."

"I was staying with the Duke of

By Warwick Deeping

Branbridge last week-end, and we had a little tennis tournament. I played with the chauffeuse."

Mrs. Odgers opened her eyes.

"His Grace's lady chaffer?"

"And we won. I should rather like a game to-morrow; we could get up four couples."

Mrs. Odgers pursued the fatal bait.

"But you played with 'is Grace's lady chaffer, Sir Philip?"

"Why, yes. She was one of the family, so to speak, mealed with us, and everything. The Duke insisted on it."

"Do you mean she was a girl like our Thomas?"

"Just the same."

Mrs. Odgers reflected.

"If we 'ad Thomas into meals, Sir Philip, she might not know 'ow to be'ave. She might be shy and awkward. But if 'is Grace 'as set the fashion."

"It is quite the custom in these days, Mrs. Odgers. All the best people do it."

That night there was a sacred but profane row in the bosom of the Gadsby Odgers' family. Ma had announced her new programme; Odgers, Esq., supported her, the "girls" were in violent opposition. Thomas was to be asked to play tennis and to dance, and to feed at the family table. This was rank Bolshevism—anarchy.

Mrs. Odgers sent her tanks to the attack; they were "'is Grace and Sir Philip." The tanks smothered the opposing machine guns and spoilt the defence. But the girls retreated, fighting.

"Well, I shan't speak to her, anyhow. If you must insult your own daughters."

"Fancy her hands—all dirty."

"Suppose she'll wear her uniform?"

But Mrs. Odgers had supped with the gods. She knew. The shadow of his Grace thoroughly reassured her.

Coverdale borrowed the Swonk-Mullinger early next morning, and

driving it himself, was away for the best part of two hours. Thomas was patching a tube in the garage when he returned.

"Well?"

"I'm to play tennis this afternoon and join you at dinner and a dance. It came as an order."

"And you'll obey it?"

"As Thomas, yes. But I haven't shoes or a racket."

"You'll find some in that brown suit case I've brought along for you."

"Yes; but, Phil, directly I'm myself I shan't be able to speak to these people. So long as I am Thomas—"

"Leave it to me, Phoebe, I understand."

The Misses Odgers went on to the courts that afternoon with the idea of seeing Thomas make a fool of herself, but things turned out otherwise. She appeared in an opal-green dress and little grey shoes and stockings, and she opened a mock single with Sir Philip. She was a very fine player, if a little out of practice, and she could beat Coverdale all over the court. A certain glumness descended on the feminine part of the Odgers' family. Matters were hurriedly rearranged in significant whispers.

"Where's Jack?"

"Don't know. He sneaked off after lunch."

"We must get up a set. Who'll play with Sir Philip?"

Coverdale settled that himself.

"Miss Thomas and I will challenge all comers."

The tennis, as tennis, was futile, and to add to the cussedness of things, the two temporary gentlemen, who had been so badly suppressed by the Misses Odgers, emptied their homage at the feet of the chauffeuse, and Coverdale made one of a crowd. He smiled and consented to the competition. In fact, he was ironically pleased.

The glumness of the Odgers deepened, but dinner was upon them before they could interfere. There

Thomas

was a consultation in Ma's bedroom. The verdict was:

"Thomas must be sacked."

Dinner was a delight. Sir Philip flirted disgracefully, and the two young men aided and abetted him. Thomas, the serene, demure, mischievous Thomas, in an exquisite little dress, held the Odgers' world in furious and puzzled thrall. They had hoped to see her eat with a knife, and instead of that she refused champagne. Sir Philip refused it too, and the Odgers' girls had been boasting about "Pa's fizz."

There was a drift after dinner into a sort of glass shelter that had been erected on the terrace. It was an exquisite June evening, still and warm. A select string band that had been brought down from town for the week-end appeared at the end of the terrace and began to play waltzes.

The mouths of the Misses Odgers looked thinner than ever. Thomas could dance. Yes, it was also more than probable that Thomas danced exceedingly well.

Then things happened very quickly. A telegraph boy on a bike, and a strange brown car, appeared simultaneously at the end of the avenue. The boy won by three yards, and Miss Odgers showed a peculiar keenness in intercepting that wire.

"For you, Pa."

Pa read it.

"Hallo. What's this?"

"Better. Am at Bloombridge Station. Can you send car. Pen-therton Atlee."

The Odgers ladies gave tongue.

"O, the dear thing."

"How scrumptious."

"Of course the car must go."

Their eyes were at once turned on Thomas.

But other happenings were in progress. The brown car had drawn up at the bottom of the terrace steps, and a footman with a couple of fur coats on his arm was ascending to the sacred precincts. He had a letter in his hand, and Coverdale rose, met him, and took that letter.

"Please excuse me."

Thomas too had risen, and was standing looking at the landscape in a dreamy and detached way.

"Thomas."

Mrs. Gadsby Odgers wheezed the summons.

Thomas did not move.

"Thomas, do you 'ear me, gurl?"

They saw Sir Philip Coverdale stuff the letter into his pocket and turn.

"Sorry, but I am afraid we must go. We have to meet our architect early to-morrow morning."

It was Mrs. Gadsby Odgers who blurted:

"We? Who's we?"

Bewildered, they saw the dreamy Thomas come suddenly to life, and smile pleasantly at the strange footman.

"Yes, I'll have the coat, Pantom."

Pantom cloaked her, and she swung the rich fur over her dress. Mrs. Odgers creaked uneasily in her chair.

"Excuse me, but do I understand that I gave a h'order to the gurl that drives our car?"

Coverdale gazed at her blandly for a moment.

"Did you? I'm afraid she can't be here. My wife, she was the honourable Phoebe Thomas, yes, the niece of the Duke of Dalling, is leaving with me. I'm sorry. Good-night."

He gave his arm to Thomas, and they went slowly down the steps to the car.

WARWICK DEEPING.

THE POACHER.

(By Warwick Deeping.)

Author of "Uther and Igraine," "The Seven Streams," "Bees of the Woods," etc.

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Dick Hemmerd, the under-keeper, met old Joshua Jenner's daughter in the lane leading down to Padworth Wood. Kitty Jenner would have passed him with nothing more than a nod of the head, but Dick stopped, and his retriever, running up to the girl, jumped up and pawed her dress. No doubt the dog failed to understand the truth that mortals are fickle in their moods and manners.

"Down, Jim, down. Good evening to you, Kitty."

The girl was brushing the dust from her dress, her lips pouting crossly. The shadow of a great holly tree fell across the spot where she had halted, deepening the contrast between her pale face and her dead black hair. The massive foliage of the tree itself was eyeletted with gold by the clear evening sky.

"We haven't run across each other for some while, have we?"

"We haven't," said the girl, curtly; "I wish you'd teach your dog manners."

"Poor old Jim is a little bit like his master."

"Indeed!"

"Glad to see you again."

He threw a questioning look at her, but the girl's face was irresponsive and cold.

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure," she said.

The under-keeper looked up the lane and down the lane, and then stared at the holly tree with its stars of golden light.

"I've something I want to talk to you about, Kitty," he said.

"Not about that? You needn't bother."

He winced a little.

"It isn't about that."

"Well?" and she grew restless.

"There's been a heavy lot of poaching lately, and the general has given us pretty strict orders. We shall be sure to stumble on someone soon. It's a pity people can't keep their hands off other people's property."

Dick brought his glance down suddenly to Kitty's face. He saw her change colour for the moment, and then draw herself up as though she regarded the hint in the light of an insult.

regarded the hint in the light of an insult.

"I don't know what you mean, Dick Hemmerd."

The under-keeper stared fixedly at the polished barrels of his gun.

"You know I'm a friend of yours, Kitty," he said, quietly.

"Indeed!"

"I don't want any trouble to come your way, if I can help it. I've got my duty to do," and he hesitated a moment, "and it wouldn't be easy, feeling what I feel."

She looked at him with a slight frown upon her face.

"I've said 'No' to you before, haven't I?" she asked.

The man forced back his shoulders.

"Supposing you have," he said, frankly, "that doesn't make me feel any less kind to you, Kitty, does it? Take the hint from me. I don't want to meddle with your father, but I've got my duty."

She turned impatiently and looked up the lane.

"You seem to know a lot," she said, sharply.

"Isn't it my business?"

"Playing the spy on people?"

Dick glanced at her, but with no show of temper.

"You don't seem to see my side of it, Kitty," he said; "I'm paid to watch the game, and I can't do less. I don't want to hurt your feelings; but it bothers me—I can tell you. I don't want to run across your father in the covert, for your sake. There's the truth."

The man was sincere enough, and in her heart of hearts, the girl knew that he spoke for the best. But with the perverse pride of feminine self-esteem she resented his knowledge of her father's failing.

"I think you'd better mind your business," she said, "and we'll mind ours."

"Don't take it that way, Kitty."

"Good evening to you," and she turned and walked on down the lane, leaving Dick Hemmerd looking after her sadly.

It was growing dusk when Kitty reached home. Joshua Jenner's cottage stood some little way from the lane, a weather-beaten old place, with a great yew tree shading the porch, and its smothering the low red brick chimney. Below in the valley the autumn woods ran like a great golden flood under the twilight towards the sea.

In the brick-paved kitchen a wood fire burnt in the open grate, the flames leaping into the open throat of the great black chimney.

flames leaping into the open throat of the great black chasm of a chimney. A kettle, hanging by a hook from the sooty chain, purred sonorously over the fire. On a stool close to the hearth sat a short, thick-set man, with a sharp grey beard and a nose like a hawk's beak. He had the stock of a gun across one knee, and appeared to be tinkering at it with a knife.

There seemed something prophetic about Dick Hemmerd's words as the girl saw the old man's figure outlined against the glow of the fire.

"Home early, father," she said, as she closed the door.

Old Joshua Jenner turned a hairy brown face towards her, a hard, dauntless face that might have served some picturesque and sea-tanned buccaner.

"Where bin?"

"Up to the village."

"Kettle's bilin'. Tea."

And with a laconic grunt he turned his attention again to the gun-stock on his knee.

Kitty took off her hat and hung it on a peg behind the door. She went to a cupboard in the corner, took

out a cloth, a couple of steel forks and knives, watching her father restlessly as she spread the cloth, and laid the table.

"Gun broken?" she asked, carelessly.

Joshua Jenner clicked the hammers to and fro.

"Having a clean up, that's all," he said.

"The rooks want scaring?"

"Rooks!" and the old man gave a contemptuous chuckle. "Sunday dinner, that's what I'm after."

Kitty set the teapot on the table, and stood looking at her father as he picked up the barrels, and squinted down them to see that they were clean.

"I saw Dick to-night," she said.

"Dick?"

"They're got a suspicion."

"They have, have they?"

"You'd better put that gun away," and she fetched plates from the dresser, and clattered them down upon the table.

Joshua Jenner turned slowly on his stool.

Dick Hemmerd's a fool," he said, roughly; "they're a pair of fools, him and old Gawtrey. If the lad's so soft on ye, why don't he send some of the stuff our way?"

Kitty moved to the fire, and lifted the kettle from the chain.

"You be careful of the hot water,"

she said, filling the teapot; "Dick means business."

Her father looked at her shrewdly.

"And ain't you clever enough to smile him into letting your old father have his little bit of sport?"

"Dick isn't that sort," she said.

"More fool he."

Kitty set the teapot on the table.

"You'll put your gun away, father."

Joshua Jenner thrust out his lower lip.

"Will I, my dear! Think I'd be coted by Dicky Hemmerd, or that old Nally Gawtrey! The dog fox ain't so cheap."

"They're on the watch, though. And the general has given orders—"

Her father sprang up with something akin to fierceness.

"D— them all," he said, "did God make the whole earth for the gentry, and ain't we poor men to have a bite? Preserve, preserve, preserve! That's why the game's sneaked, my dear, and that's why we breaks the gentlemen's laws. You can't catch a Padworth man in Padworth Wood. If Dick Hemmerd or old Gawtrey ever set on me, I'll give them a blaze, by the Lord—that's the truth."

He was so grim over it all that Kitty stood silent, staring at him with frightened eyes. She knew her father's nature only too well. Half the young men in Padworth village were afraid of him, for he had the temper of a Norse rover, and a pair of fists that flew like a colt's hoofs.

"Don't talk like that, dad," she said more gently.

He laid the gun aside, and came to the table.

"Cut the loaf."

She obeyed him meekly.

"You won't go out, dad."

"Go out I shall."

"It isn't worth it."

"That's all you know about the sport of it, my dear. It's worth spiting that old fool Gawtrey. To see him go away gerin' round in his velvetens when the general's got a shoot on makes me mad. There's a look in him as though he were sayin' to himself, 'Every blessed bit of fur and feather in Padworth Wood belongs to me—and my master.' Curse him." And the old man began to munch his bread, nor could Kitty win more words from him.

There was a full moon that night, with a light wind blowing from the west, and setting the great yew tree whispering outside Kitty's window. She had gone up to her room after ineffectual pleadings with her father, and a feeling of dread and unrest had taken

recumbent postures with her father, and a feeling of dread and unrest had taken hold of the girl's heart. She knew the fierce and obstinate temper of the old man below, and the instinctive love of poaching that was a part of his very blood. She felt, too, that Dick Hemmerd was not the man to be frightened from his duty, even though he loved her and had no wish to meddle.

Midnight came, and still she sat on the edge of her bed, and listened, the vague sense of dread deepening in her with the deepening of the night. Her father was stirring in the room below. She heard him go to the drawer where he kept his cartridges, and the click of the latch as he opened the door. Kitty went to the window and looked out. She saw her father go slowly down the path to the hedge skirting over the piece of meadow. A sudden impulse seized her, urging her to follow him. She obeyed it, feeling a presentiment strong in her that two men were in peril from each other that night.

Full of mystery were the woods under the white witchery of the moon. Mist stood in the valleys, while the glittering turrets of the trees rose height on height against the cloudless sky. The perfume of some wood fire still burning drifted far on the night air. A light breeze made the myriad brown leaves sigh and whisper, till the woods seemed alive with the murmur of an oracle.

Kitty, a cloak over her shoulders, had enough to do to keep in touch with the skulking figure of her father, for with the moonlight shining every dark tree bole mimicked the figure of a man. Sometimes Josh Jenner halted and stood still awhile. And when he moved she had to keep her distance for fear of her father hearing her, and yet hold close enough so as not to lose him in the woods. Old Josh Jenner's hearing was not so sharp as of yore, but he could still see a nail in a fence at twenty paces.

There was a sudden rattling of dead leaves, and a whirr of wings.

Bang—bang.

Kitty shuddered at the sound, for the roar of the gun seemed loud enough to wake half Padworth village. Her father had come to an open glade. She saw him run forward, stoop, and shuffle something into a capacious pocket.

Instead of retreating now, as the girl had hoped, he moved on again up a

slope where a spruce wood towered many pinnaced under the moon. Kitty followed him, her heart going at a canter, her ears catching all manner of imaginary sounds. She could see her

father, her ears catching all manner of imaginary sounds. She could see her father's figure before her dimly in the moonlight, as he mounted the slope slowly his gun in the hollow of his arm.

Suddenly he stopped, and stood listening, turning his head this way and that. Kitty's teeth began to chatter, half with suspense, half with the raw cold. Josh Jenner crouched, and began to creep aside from the path he had been following. A dead bough cracked in the dark of the unseen; the rattling of the leaves in the night wind had other sounds behind it.

There was the swish-swish of a man running through the bracken.

"Hallo, there!"

Kitty held her breath. Peering round a tree trunk she had a glimpse of her father kneeling on one knee, and poking his gun forward.

"Keep off!"

"Hallo, I've got you, have I?"

The man was still advancing. Kitty saw her father's figure stiffen.

"Move another step and I'll shoot," he growled.

"Ah—would you?"

There was a rush of feet, the deep roar of a gun, a cry from the girl behind the tree. Old Jenner, his gun smoking, was scrambling away into the shadows, looking back fiercely over his shoulder. Kitty had no thought for him, save for one rush of horror at the old man's savagery. It hurt her, this vivid consciousness that he had dared to do this thing—her own father whom she loved in spite of his grim heart.

Kitty acted like one driven through the marvels of a dream, neither questioning nor wondering, but only following out some swift series of sensations. She found herself in an open glade with the black fringes of the spruce trees breathing softly against the sky.

Lying in the pool of light where the moon shone through the trees she saw a black shape twisting to and fro as though in pain. Kitty could hear the man draw his breath in sharply through his clenched teeth. However anomalous the situation might seem, she felt a rush of relief at seeing him move and suffer. She had dreaded to find something very mute and still.

"Dick!"

She was down beside him, but the man seemed paralysed by the paroxysms of pain. He lay propped upon his two hands, his face down to the ground.

"Dick!"

He turned a sharp, drawn face suddenly to hers, and looked up at her in a dazed and helpless way. The human

a dazed and helpless way. The human tenderness in the girl's heart leapt out to the man at that look. "Who is it? Oh, my Lord—"

"It's me, Dick, Kitty. Where is it, where did he hit you?"

She put one arm about him, and let him rest against her, feeling him quiver as he strove to fight back the pain.

"It's all right; it'll be better in a moment. First smart of the shot; loved me that's all."

He bit the words as they came, still twisting and turning a little as he rested against the girl. Kitty put a hand forward, and felt blood. Old Josh had fired low, and the charge, beginning to spread, had caught Dick Hemmerd in the right thigh.

"Your handkerchief, Dick."

He fumbled for it, a great red bandana.

"Lie down, lad," and she let him sink back on the ground, and taking the handkerchief, knotted it tightly round the wound setting her teeth as she twisted the knots in, and felt the man wince.

"Don't mind me, Kitty. There's a flask somewhere in my jacket pocket."

She felt for it, and held it to his lips while he drank.

"Ah—that's better! You must have thought me a beast of a cry-baby, but—my Lord—it burnt like a hot iron."

She took the flask, recorked it and slipped it back into his pocket. Then, womanwise, as though the cords of strain had snapped about her heart, she broke out into tears.

Dick glanced at her sharply, and tried to take her hand.

"What is it, Kit? Don't, now, don't. How did you come here?"

She turned her head away behind her hand.

"I followed him. I had a feeling something would happen. He wouldn't listen to what I said."

Dick Hemmerd drew a deep breath.

"I shouldn't have thought he'd have pulled the trigger on me," he said: "the old man seems to lose something inside his head when he gets fighting, or comes out like this."

"He's a devil," she said, almost fiercely, and then with a shudder, "no, he isn't that, poor old dad: oh—Dick!" and she could say no more.

The man lay very still a moment, looking up at the sky between the black stems of the spruce trees. The smart of the wound had lessened, and he could think.

"Kit," he said suddenly.

She hung her head and waited.

"I'm not going to give the old man away: he's your father, Kitty."

away: he's your father, Kitty."

She looked at him, half incredulously.

"I can patch a lie and say I was shot by my own gun."

"Dick!"

"It might be worth it."

She stopped suddenly, and kissed him.

"Halloo—Hemmerd—haloo!"

Dick started, and pushed the girl away from him. The hail came from the woods down by the meadow.

"Quick, Kit, my gun—"

She gave it to him, and he fired one barrel in the air.

"Here, take it, lay it at the foot of that tree—as though I had set it against the trunk, and it had slipped."

Kitty obeyed him.

"Run. Keep down towards the ponds. That's Gawtrey shouting. He'll come by the main ride. I can carry the game through all right. Run."

She slipped away into the moonlit woods, hearing Dick's voice answering

the headkeeper's hail, from where he lay under the spruce trees.

Kitty say nothing of her father as she stole homewards in the moonlight. She gained the meadow at last behind the cottage, and stood under the hedge awhile, listening, but heard no sound save the roughing of the wind in the trees. Her heart was full of many emotions nor were the least of them compassion and gratitude towards Dick. She went into the cottage, but did not light a candle lest Gawtrey the headkeeper should see the light and have his suspicions aroused. Her father had not returned, for she went up to his bedroom, to find the door open, and the bed untouched.

No doubt the old man was still lurking in the woods, or making a wide circuit from the place where he had shot Dick Hemmerd. Kitty went below, and, drawing a chair before the embers of the fire, sat down to watch and wait.

An hour had passed when she heard slow footsteps coming stealthily up the garden path. Going to the window she saw a crouching figure, a mere shadow in the moonlight, creeping along under cover of the hedge. There was the rattle of the latch, and old Josh Jenner came in, and cautiously closed the door.

"So you've come back father."

The old man gave a great start, drove his hand to his forehead, and then he growled something through his beard.

"Lucky for you, father if we don't have the police round here to-morrow."

"What's that?"

"I saw you shoot Dick Hemmerd. It

"I saw you shoot Dick Hemmerd. It was a coward's shot, and that's the truth."

Josh Jenner stared at her, his hands twitching, his face a dead white in the moonlight.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he asked, hoarsely.

"What I say," she answered.

"You!"

"Yes, I tied his wound up for him; then—we heard old Gawtreys shouting."

"Curse him."

"Dick's going to swear he was shot by his own gun."

The old man looked fiercely incredulous.

"What's that?"

"Dick fired one barrel off, and told me to lay the gun at the bottom of a tree as though it had slipped. That's what Dick is going to do for the man who shot him."

Josh Jenner pulled his beard.

"Well—he is a softy," was the old man's remark.

"Father!"

"Just because a woman's got a pretty face. If a man shot me, I'd have it out of him, for all the women in the British Empire."

Kitty's eyes gleamed. Her father had not failed to bequeath some of the hereditary temper to his daughter.

"Dick's got a heart in him, and that's more than you have this night, father. What had the poor lad done to you—that you shot him—just like a dog."

The old man looked at her with sardonic contempt.

"He'd have caught me, wouldn't he? And if he had—I should have to have fought him; and a charge of shot in the legs at twenty yards did the thing cleaner, and kept him from seeing who I was."

"Dick was only doing his duty," and from her ardour it appeared that her views had changed with quaint abruptness in a night.

"He's a hired cov. Aren't we poor men to have a little bit of snout?"

"I tell you what it is, father. I am going to make you give up poaching."

"You?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you how."

Mr. Jenner produced the barrels of a gun from a convenient trouser leg.

"Go on with you, you little—"

"Listen to me, dad, and don't call names. The next time you go out poaching, I'll tell the police how Dick got shot."

"You will."

"That's the truth."

The uncompromising pose of her comely head, and defiance on her face

The uncompromising pose of her comely head, and defiance on her face

were visible to the old man in the moonlight. He stared hard at her, and then turned aside with an expression of disgust.

"Dutiful daughter—you be," he said, bitterly.

"Do you think I want to have you hanged in the County Gaol?" she retorted. "No, I don't. No, I'll just see that you sell your gun."

For the next fortnight or more all Padworth talked of Dick Hemmerd's accident in the woods, how Mr. Gawtreys had found him, "weltering in his blood." Hemmerd's explanation of the affair had convicted him of carelessness, according to certain discerning critics. Old Josh Jenner listened solemnly to the various expert theories propounded in the tap-room of The Royal Oak. When asked his opinion, he smiled a profound smile and shook his head.

"Guns be funny creatures," he allowed, "very near as funny as women, and just about as touchy in the trigger."

It was well into November before Dick Hemmerd took his first walk like an old gentleman with a stiff knee, and with a stick to lean on. For some reason known only to the impressionable heart of youth, his steps tended in the direction of the cottage above Padworth Wood, and equally remarkable was the coincidence that permitted him to meet Kitty coming down the lane. The girl had so far jeopardised her pride as to call at the cottage where the under-keeper lodged, but this was the first time she had been alone with Dick since that night in the spruce wood.

They were a little shy of each other at first, but not for long. The robins twittering in the hedgerow could have informed Mr. Joshua Jenner of the fact that he would probably have a game-keeper for a son-in-law.

The pair met the old man coming home from work as they loitered in the lane close to the cottage. The meeting was not without embarrassment for all concerned, though there was a peculiar twinkle deep down in the old poacher's eyes.

"Come in, Mr. Hemmerd, and have a drop of tea."

"Thanks, Mr. Jenner, I don't mind if I do." They entered the cottage, Kitty taking Dick into the little front parlour, and letting him rest on the sofa while she lit the fire. Her father was in the kitchen washing his hands

was in the kitchen washing his hands in a tin bowl full of water. Kitty went to him very quietly after closing the parlour door, and favoured him with a piece of information that appeared to lift Mr. Jenner with cynical amusement.

"Go along with you," he said, shaking the water over his face. "The man must be a fool."

Fool or no fool, Mr. Jenner chanced upon a very significant incident as he stumped into the parlour for tea. Kitty drew back hurriedly from the sofa, while Dick Hemmerd sat staring out of the window as though profoundly interested in Mr. Jenner's yellow erythemas.

Tea proved a somewhat silent meal, Dick and the girl glancing furtively at each other, while the old man sat stolidly in his chair, and buttered his bread with meditative deliberation.

He disappeared abruptly at the conclusion of the meal and they heard him rummaging in the kitchen. When he returned he had his gun in his hand and a tin box containing about a dozen cartridges.

"Suppose you two youngsters understand each other other?" he asked.

Dick looked coy.

"If you've no objection, Mr. Jenner—"

"Me? I'd better make you a present of the old gun—I fancy since you've poached my darter. Can't shoot my own son-in-law, Mr. Hemmerd, can I?"

Dick laughed and held out a hand.

"Then I'm well insured, Mr. Jenner. Let's call it quits."

And so according to the inscrutable workings of Fate, it was decreed that old Josh Jenner had poached his last bird in Padworth Wood.

The New Magazine May 1921 Done

Mr. Veroness' Socks

Not to mention His Heart and the
Heart of Mademoiselle Susette

By Warwick Deeping

PAUL VERONESS walked slowly up the cliff path under the blue of an April sky. The world was all blue: the sea, the sky, his own thoughts. And yet there was the air of a comical swagger about Paul Veroness; he knew that he was swaggering in the face of his own misery; it was about the only thing that was left him, the right to swagger. He paused more than once on the path and, looking back at the great white pile of architecture, even at the Casino of Monte Carlo, spread his spiritual fingers at it and smiled.

"Rotten place! You have broken me? Not a bit of it. I say—it's hot!"

The cynic in him suggested that he need not bother about the heat. He could leave the heat to the bees and the lizards, the agaves and myrtles. The sea would be quite sufficiently cool for a man who contemplated committing suicide.

A lost angel on the rocks, a breezy and amiable angel with a round, good-tempered face, humorous brown eyes, a little black moustache and an incipient limpness about the waistcoat. Such was Mr. Veroness. Nature had manufactured him for villa life in Surbiton, with a dog, a boat on the river, a comfortable wife who had no prejudices against powdering her face, and a little mild business in town. Nature had done this and then got him mixed up in her shop. She had sold him to the wrong person, put him in the wrong house, shipped him into the wrong sort of business. Hence vagabondage, Monte Carlo, a fair knowledge of the French language, and the rocks.

Mr. Veroness was making for that particular seat, that Sappho's bench poised between the blue of the sea and sky, a mere niche in the cliff hidden and cherished by a tangle of arbutus, resinous shrubs and dwarf pines. You could drop a stone from it into the blue of the sea.

Some trailing thing gave a tug at Paul's Panama hat, and tweaked it sideways.

"Dash it," said he, "remember a chap's dignity!"

And then he brushed round a smother of arbutus trees, turned the last corner, and found that seat occupied.

Its occupant was a Frenchwoman who had taken off her *chapeau* and perched it on a low wall in front of the seat. She looked a compact and businesslike little woman, pretty, sombre, *petite*, with a skin like cream and eyes like a black night in Paris. She glanced with pathetic annoyance at Mr. Paul Veroness.

Mr. Veroness took off his hat.

"Please accept my apologies."

"Perhaps I am in the way, Monsieur."

"Impossible."

And then he scented another of Nature's ineptitudes; and an amiable audacity, the sympathetic audacity of the born vagabond, helped him to plunge.

"Pardon me, Madame, but I have seen you at the tables?"

"It is possible, Monsieur."

"You sat opposite to me yesterday."

"I remember you, Monsieur."

"And you lost."

"I lost."

"So did I—my last five francs! Hence this seat, and the reflection that life is rather boring, and the sea very restful and cool."

She looked at him quite calmly with the nonchalance of a Parisian. Most respectable Englishmen would have misunderstood her completely, but Paul Veroness—the vagabond—understood her at once. She was neither decadent nor hysterically cynical, but just a woman—a shrewd little Frenchwoman, who had come to the conclusion that it was bad business to live.

"So you are here, Monsieur, to take a dive into that pleasant sea?"

"That is so, Madame."

"And I am here for the same purpose."

She leant forward over the low stone wall, the sunlight showing on her white neck and dense black hair.

"Yes. It is very blue, is it not? There is no foam to-day, and the water looks quite deep at the bottom of the cliff."

Paul Veroness sat down suddenly on the end of the seat. He felt a little giddy, and her quaint and quiet matter-of-factness upset him. Life was all wrong somehow. What business had this pretty woman to be sitting here and making her calm plans for throwing herself into the sea? It was all very well for a man, some battered old cosmopolitan tramp, but for a woman, no. Besides, she was not the sort of woman whom the world would be the better for losing. Veroness knew something about women; he had the feminine sense, and he always looked at a woman's mouth and eyes. This little Frenchwoman had soft eyes and a generous mouth. She did not belong to the great family of vultures.

"Supposing we postpone it for half an hour," he said, taking off his hat and mopping his forehead. "Don't mind me. Say what you please. My name is Paul Veroness; I was an Englishman; I'm of no account whatever."

She sat back and studied him with solemn black eyes. Perhaps she saw something pathetic in him, even as he had seen pathos in her.

"I am Susette. We need not bother about the other name. And have you lost all your money?"

He nodded.

"So have I. But that does not explain anything. People who have lost all their money do not always want to kill themselves. It means that they have lost something else."

He smiled at her.

"I knew you had a head. One loses the lust to live. Existing becomes too complicated a business—a bore; one gets tired of being half a hypocrite and half a clown. And you—?"

"Please go on."

"Oh, certainly, Mademoiselle Susette, if you prefer it. Society insisted on me being a failure; I was not sufficiently selfish and greedy. I kept bobbing up again, but society always pushed me under. Always bad luck. And this time I felt I was under for good, and I couldn't be bothered to come up again."

She nodded.

"Yes. That's just it. Life became such a business."

"A tragic business, Mademoiselle Susette! Think of it: no one to mend your socks. I bought new ones, when there was any money, but now!— You can't go on living without socks. That's the tragedy."

Her eyes softened, and little glimmers of light crept into them.

"Poor Monsieur Paul; I understand. And you have been starving yourself, too."

She had noticed a white flabbiness, a pinched look about his nostrils; and that his hands were very thin.

"And your luck has been bad, too?"

"Oh, I was a failure," she said with a reckless shrug. "The wrong number always turned up. My parents were odd numbers; my husband was a wrong number; my home was zero. I ran away and went under. Then I had a chance, quite a pleasant chance; it looked like the first good number I had ever seen. But I wanted money, for I am not a parasite, my friend, so I came here to have a last fight with my luck. Bad—as usual. I'm tired of it all; I want to go to sleep."

Paul Veroness stared at the sea.

"And you are not in love," he said rather irrelevantly.

She fired up.

"I have had enough of being in love. Men are such fools."

"That's true," said he. "But I could say some—"



"Please accept my apologies"

MR. VERONESS' SOCKS

thing about women. Mine wanted me to make money, a lot of money; that's all she cared about. She scolded me till I tried to be greedy, and then, of course, I lost the lot. That settled it. She— Oh, well, never mind."

They sat in silence for awhile, feeling rather than thinking, each conscious of the other as a creature of emotion rather than as a thing of reason.

Presently Veroness began talking again.

"You had a chance, then?"

"Yes."

"I haven't so much as that. What sort of chance was it, Mademoiselle Susette?"

"It was a hat shop."

"A hat shop. In Paris?"

"Yes. I love hats, I adore pretty hats, I have a soul for hats, for creating hats."

"I think you would have," he said.

"A friend of mine—a girl—has a little shop in the Rue de ——. She wanted me, and she wanted money. She is a sport. She would have taken me without money, but I said: 'No, my dear, I bring money, or I do not come. If I can get money it will mean that I have broken my bad luck. Those are my terms.' Of course, it was another wrong number."

"And how much money did you want?"

"It was seven thousand francs," she confessed, with a sudden girlish melting towards him.

He sat staring at the sea again, and then something live seemed to jar in him.

"Hang sentiment!" he said. "But after all, what is sentiment?"

He was feeling something on a finger of his left hand.

"See that?"

He held up his left hand, and she saw a gold ring set with diamonds and rubies.

"It belonged to my mother. I meant to keep it; go under with it. She was a good woman, my mother. But, after all, it is the living who matter. I'll sell it."

She caught him by the shoulder.

"No."

"Yes. I will. It's a chance. I'll try Daddy Stanislas. And Mademoiselle Susette, I implore you to wait for me."



They sat in silence for awhile.

He darted off down the path with the ingenuous enthusiasm of the eternal boy and the born vagabond. The little Frenchwoman looked after him, made a rather pathetic grimace, and tried to reassume her attitude of cynical apathy.

"And I had just made up my mind," she said to herself, "when he must come blundering in. I suppose I shall have to wait. Such a *bon enfant* too, and rather charming; the sort of man who is quite happy with a fishing-rod and a dog, who falls in love with you each time you put on a new hat, and tells you so. What an idiot that English parsnip must have been!"

She waited; half an hour, an hour, and then she heard footsteps and the sound of someone brushing past the bushes. He was hot and excited. The neck of a bottle of red wine protruded from one pocket, and he was carrying a little parcel.

"You are a sportswoman—you have not run away. Yes, I did quite well."

He sat down and handed her the little parcel.

"Sandwiches, *pâté-de-foie-gras*. And a bottle of Pommard. Oh, dash!"

He looked quite tragic for a moment.

"No corkscrew! We shall have to break the neck off. Apyhow, I brought a glass. And listen, Susette; I have had an indication—such an indication."

She was calmly unfastening the string of the parcel, and maintaining a sturdy and incredulous calm.

"Well?"

"The man at Daddy Stanislas' gave me

two hundred and seventy francs for the ring, and he had only three fingers on his right hand."

"Three fingers."

"Yes, three fingers. There is the number."

"Eat a sandwich, my friend," she said with a soft motherliness. "I see that you are incurable."

"No, I'm thirsty. Here goes the neck of the bottle. But I'm not incurable, Susette—I never wanted to gamble. I want a little work, a chair, someone to laugh with, someone who wears pretty hats and scolds me now and again because I matter, a day's fishing sometimes, a stroll in the Boulevards and two chairs outside a café in the evening. Now then, drink to our luck."

"I won't," she said.

"Well, drink to the memory of my poor dead socks."

"You silly boy!" she said, with a sudden softness towards him.

It was a sad little picnic lunch in spite of the red wine and Paul's new enthusiasm. Mademoiselle Susette clung loyally to her pessimism and tried to

chasten Paul's new exuberance. He was just a boy, a boy who was running straight towards one last, merciless disappointment.

And then they came near quarrelling. He produced the money, and tried to persuade her that the adventure should be hers.

"No, my friend, I have finished."

"But your luck?"

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Try your own luck—for the last time. If it proves good, I'll count mine as cured. And don't worry about me, dear friend; I was quite resigned and calm over it."

"But, dash it! I'm not," said he. "I might have been if you hadn't sympathised about the socks, and I hadn't been so fond of pretty hats. It's made me alive again; and you are much too—charming, Susette, to be wasted on the sea."

"Go down there and get it over," she said gently.

"By heaven, so I will."

But he turned and came suddenly back to her and looked appealingly into her eyes.

"You'll wait, Susette; you will give me the last chance? You won't throw yourself——?"

"I'll wait," she said.

Yet all Mr. Veroness' audacity deserted him as he walked up the hill to the Casino. The great building was like a bully, a monstrous and compelling tyrant that had dominated him, swallowed his money, and knocked him out with huge indifference. The very smell of the place, the heat, the look of the people filled him with an incipient nausea.

"Dash it," he said. "If it wasn't for that hat shop I'd turn back. Oh, Lord! If I only had a little money, a clean corner somewhere, and a cosy little wife. I'm tired; I want to go to sleep."

He went into the Casino, and past the uniformed people, who seemed to stare at him with peculiar

curiosity and insolence. His face was nearly as white as his collar, and his right hand lay in the side pocket of his vest, clutching a little bundle of notes. His one desire now was to get it over and done with. To plunge, to come to the end of the period of undarned socks.

Mr. Veroness walked straight up to the nearest table, edged himself in and found that the players were placing their stakes. He did not notice any of the faces. It is doubtful if he saw anything but the green table, and that one, mystic, problematical number.

He lumped the whole money on "3," and called the nearest croupier's attention to it, stuffed his hands into his pockets, and watched the dashed wheel of fate go spinning round.



Called the nearest croupier's attention to it

MR. VERONESS' SOCKS

On the cliffs of Monaco Susette sat and waited. She refused to hope, refused to get excited, but held obstinately to that mood of cool and apathetic resignation. Nothing mattered. Nothing good could ever happen to her again. The shutters of life were up; the little business was closed, and after all—the blue sea was better than the Seine.

And yet, she would have liked to have used her needle. He was so lost, such an affectionate creature, just the sort of man— It was quite absurd, but he had inspired a quite extraordinary and inexplicable tenderness in her, a desire to mother and scold him, to be taken care of by him, to be made love to, walk with arm and arm— *Mon Dieu!* what a lot of nonsense, impossible nonsense!

Suddenly she sat rigid, listening. There were footsteps coming up the path—quick, tumultuous footsteps. She could even hear the sound of someone breathing. And then he burst on her, red in the face, panting, eyes a-light, flourishing something that he had wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

"Three turned up! Three turned up!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said.

"I had put the whole bally lot on three. Eight thousand, seven hundred francs or so. Susette!—oh, my lord!"

He collapsed on the seat, done; exhausted yet exultant—and somehow his head had to rest on her shoulder. He went from red to white, and she unfastened his collar and made a soft commotion over him, as only a woman can.

"I'm all right, Susette; a bit off my head, that's all. Well, I've got it for you, haven't I? Take it, my dear."

He sat up and placed the bundle of notes in her lap.

"What do you mean?" she said suddenly, her eyes very big and wide.

"Why, the little hat shop—for you, of course. That's what I was after; that's why I had the pluck to risk it. Well, that's settled, Susette. You can go back to Paris, you know, with a new streak of luck. I'm glad. I'm mighty glad. I can go off quite happily now."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear, the money is yours. I got it for you. I shall have made quite a decent finish—and I shan't mind the sea."

And suddenly she burst into tears.

"As if it were possible," she sobbed, "as if I could!"

Paul Veroness sat and stared at her,



"Three turned up—three turned up"

shocked, bewildered. What the devil was the matter now? Tears were the very last things he had expected, and yet they upset him very seriously, gave him a thickness in the throat. And she was the sort of woman he had always admired: a plump, cosy, chic, dark-eyed little woman, a woman who made you feel warm and happy, a woman who smelt like a flower-stall near the Madeleine in spring.

"Dash it, Susette! What's the matter, dear? Don't you want that share in the hat shop?"

"Of course! Of course I want it, but don't you understand—I—"

He edged closer to her, his own eyes growing rather hot and misty.

"There, there! Uncle Paul is so pleased to give you the money. He's a silly fool—"

"Yes, a silly fool," she blurted out with sudden passion.

"Susette—!"

"And he's not Uncle Paul."

"Well—what then—!"

She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Silly, do you think I could take the money—unless——?"

"Unless——?"

Her red lips were very sweet to kiss.

"I want to mend your socks for you."

He put a hand on each of her shoulders and looked at her with immense earnestness.

"What! You want to——?"

"Yes. Just as you want the hat shop for me——"

Paul Veroness' face lit up like the face of

"Why not?" said Susette. "I shan't take the money unless you come with it."

Then they kissed and held each other like a couple of young lovers.

"Dash it," said Mr. Veroness, a little out of breath but wholly exultant, "we'll dine at the Paris—what! Just a celebration, Susette. No, no! No squandering—not likely. Our luck has come back, and I'll be a regular miser for it. No cigars—you know."

She stroked his cheek.

"Just one—in the evening, when we sit at our little table outside the café."

"*Ma chérie!* And the little shop, full of pretty *chapeaux* and flowers and ribbons. And we'll have a little *maisonnette* somewhere, and I'll get a job—with Cook's or somebody—I don't mind what it is."

"You speak French so well," said she. "But we might want you in the shop, my Paul, and put up a notice: '*Ici on parle Anglais.*'"

"Great! What a head you've got! That might come later."

"And on Sundays."

"Yes."

"You shall go out and fish, or we'll have a little picnic in the Bois."

"And you'll wear the prettiest hat, and be just the most charming——"

They kissed again.

Then Paul Veroness got up and bowed with great solemnity to the sea.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Neptune; no, we are not calling to-day. I have an appointment

with a very exquisite little woman—who——"

"I'm going to mend my socks," said Susette.



"Sorry to disappoint you - Mr Neptune"

a man who had woke up to find some great pain gone.

"You want to——? Well, I'm dashed! You mean we'll be partners and get married——?"

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THOMAS RITSON

By WARWICK DEEPING

HE was sitting on the grass bank just where the river Cam approaches Clare Bridge, a rather melancholy little man in a snuff-coloured suit. His tie had an aggressive redness, his boots were very broad across the toes, and his collar was at least five years out of date.

He had a book with him; someone's very learned monograph on the morphology of Cycads. But he was not reading the book; he was watching the Canadian canoes passing to and fro over the still surface of the river. May Week had brought a flutter of femininity into the college courts. It had drifted out here on to the river, a gauzy, delicate, and utterly delightful invasion propelled by youngsters in many coloured blazers and floppy white hats.

Sometimes a canoe bumped along the bank close to where Thomas Ritson was sitting. There would be a laughing girl in it with an abundance of cushions to make her comfortable, while somebody's brother handled the paddle. Perhaps the girl's eyes would glance momentarily at the little man on the bank, find nothing arrestive about him, and leave him with a light-hearted negligence that was suggestive and provoking.

That was what Thomas Ritson was feeling, had been feeling for a very long time. Two very worthy people had launched him on his career with a healthy body and a sound head, an infinite capacity for taking pains, and an almost slavish love of hard work. He had been a major scholar; he had headed examination lists, scooped in honours, got himself the reputation of being a dull little man with a horrible genius for swatting. For three years he had been coaching cubs, and acting as demonstrator in one of the laboratories. And yet he had had a vague suspicion that something was lacking, that he was not a success. He had applied for ambitious posts, and people had passed him over.

This crowd on the river filled him with a restless envy, a helpless discontent. He did not belong to it, but

he wanted to belong to it. These youngsters in blazers were the lords of something that he lacked. He knew quite well that none of those girls would have been proud of him in a canoe. He remembered that May Week when his mother and Millie had come down from Leeds and he had taken them out in a boat. He had realised then that they had not fitted into the picture—his mother all in black, a beaming, proud, bourgeois creature in a bonnet that was aggressively a bonnet; Millie in a pink, local-made dress and a hat that was, for her, utterly frivolous, looking like a sunflower growing on a rose bush. He remembered that he had not enjoyed it.

A canoe drifted by. Voices came from it, lazy, confident voices.

"I had a ripping time skiing last winter. We went on to Cannes, and I had a knock in the tennis tournament."

"How jolly! We went to Egypt. Father is such a terror! He always wants to see things."

Thomas Ritson picked up his book and prepared to read. But he could not fix himself on the eccentricities of Cycads. He was reading inside his own brain.

How easily these people did things! They seemed so confoundedly casual, drifting about as though life had been laid out, built and furnished all ready for them by some titanic universal provider.

Why wasn't he like them? Bother it all, he could knock all these youngsters heads off so far as knowledge went. He was earning good money, too, coaching his cubs.

And yet he was a sort of outsider, and he was conscious of the fact. The strenuous, many degreed giants in his own particular corner of life had never taken any notice of him. There was Cartwright, for instance, though Cartwright was on the edge of being a Professor, and yet Cartwright treated him with a breezy speed that was galling.

"Just get these preparations ready

Cassell's Magazine of Fiction

for me, Ritson. I'm horribly rushed," or "You might look through those papers and let me have them back by to-morrow night."

Ritson glanced up from the pages of his book. Someone was speaking.

"Oh! do be careful! I know you are very clever——"

A Canadian canoe was rocking dangerously about five yards from the bank. Adventurous youth had elected to show off in it by putting the paddle across the gunwale and sitting on the paddle's handle. An anxious young woman in white was trying to look dignified.

"I think you are a little beast!"

"Oh—rats! It's all right. Besides——"

It was all wrong, for the paddle took upon itself to change its position abruptly, and the young man squatting on it had to follow suit. He fell half in and half out of the canoe. The light shell heeled over, filled, and sank.

Thomas Ritson performed the one great spontaneous act of his life. He threw book and hat aside, and went into the water with an heroic splash.

As a matter of fact, Ritson was never out of his depth, but he did not realise it, being wholly intent on reaching a mass of white drapery and a picture hat that the sinking canoe had left floating on the surface of the Cam. Ritson always congratulated himself on the fact that he reached her before the other fellow did. He made a grab at the collar of a white blouse, just as the girl's chin was going under water.

"Please keep cool, don't clutch at me!"

He nearly dragged her below the surface in his energetic enthusiasm.

"Thanks so much. Really—I can swim——"

She spluttered, and then, to his astonishment, he found that she was laughing.

"I think we can walk out. It's not very deep."

Ritson tested the assertion, and found himself standing with the water reaching a little below his armpits.

"Give me a hand. It's this wretched skirt of mine."

They waded out, while a scattered crowd of canoes and boats rushed up like a lot of excited swans. Also the originator of the catastrophe came splashing up, very sick with himself, and wholly penitent.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, Miss Lutterel. Let me help you out——"

But Thomas Ritson was not going to be jockeyed out of the post of honour.

"Jolly careless of you. I'll climb out first and give you a hand."

And a bedraggled object she was, and yet charming in spite of it with her laughing eyes and her spirit of fun.

"Oh, heavens! Isn't there a sentry-box or something you can hide me in!"

Ritson surveyed her critically.

"I'll get you a cab; there will sure to be one on the K.P. You must get home and change. Just walk round to the gate."

The other youth was burning to justify himself, but Ritson was off like a quarter-miler, the water squelching out of his shoes.

He captured his cab, found the river nymph waiting just inside the porter's lodge and beginning to shiver.

"I say, I hope you won't catch cold."

It was he who helped her into the cab.

"What address?"

She gave him the number of a house in a street near Christ's College.

"Oh, that's no distance——"

"Thank you so very much. Go home and change."

The cabby whipped up his horse, and Ritson found himself standing on the pavement beside a wet young man with a sulky, offended face. They glared at each other, and went their several ways without speaking.

In half an hour Thomas Ritson had rubbed himself down and got into dry clothes. He felt none the worse for the adventure; in fact, he was possessed by a sense of exhilaration.

He remembered that his hat and the book on Cycads were still lying on the grass beside the river, and he set out to rescue them. He had reached the gateway of King's, when the whole ultimate significance of the adventure dawned on him. Of course, he ought to go and inquire for her. He would go at once. It was a mere matter of common courtesy.

He went, but when he had his hand on the door-bell a sudden shyness attacked him. He hesitated; it was the critical moment of his career; a small servant girl dashing out with a milk jug caught him faltering on the edge of his indecision.

She stared. Ritson had to explain his presence on the doorstep.

"I've come to inquire about the lady who fell into the river."

The Transformation of Thomas Ritson

The maid set the milk jug on the doorstep.

"What name, please?"

"Mr. Ritson. I'm the man who helped to get her out of the water."

The girl vanished, and returned in half a minute.

"Will you step upstairs, sir. Miss Lutterel would like to see you."

Thomas Ritson stepped upstairs, feeling strangely adventurous and awkward. The girl shepherded him into an upper room into which the afternoon sunlight poured under the half-drawn blinds. There were flowers in the window boxes, red geraniums and white daisies.

"Please come in, Mr. Ritson."

And Ritson blushed to the roots of his wiry brown hair. Fate had pushed him into a magical and unfamiliar atmosphere, into a room that was charged with a perfume of femininity. The river nymph was there on a sofa near the window, wrapped in a light blue kimono, embroidered with golden birds. Little silver slippers peeped out from under it. Her dark hair was no longer streaked and plastered over her cheeks and ears. Her eyes seemed to find life a delightful jest.

"I thought I would come and inquire—how you were."

"And I haven't really thanked you yet. It was very plucky of you to jump in as you did. That chair there is the most comfortable."

He sat down, his straw hat between his knees.

"Oh, not at all—don't mention it."

"You'll stay and have tea with me. I am sure you must want it. You didn't get chilled?"

"Not in the least."

He looked rather frightened. She leant over and rang the bell.

"What an experience! I've ruined a new frock."

"I'm very sorry," he said. "Most annoying. And I had my Sunday suit on."

Her eyelids lifted a little, but she smothered the amusement in her eyes.

"I'm so sorry. Won't you put your hat down. Oh, Nellie, Mr. Ritson is going to stay to tea with me."

"Yes, miss."

The maid had bobbed in and bobbed out again, and Thomas Ritson had abandoned his hat. His hands felt rather lost without it; he stuffed them in his jacket pockets, drew them out again; eventually they came to rest upon his knees.

"I suppose you are up here for May Week?"

She laughed.

"Yes, in a sense. And you—what is your college?"

"Trinity."

"How lovely to be at Trinity. Do you row?"

He blushed.

"Well—you see—I'm a don."

"Good heavens! I ought to apologise."

"Not at all. I'm a demonstrator, and I coach fellows for the scientific tripos."

"How learned you must be—and so young!"

She laughed in her friendly, easy way, and, studying him, discovered that she had to do with a shy and unfamiliar bird. He struck her as being rather helpless, a man who had missed winning the élan and confidence of an athletic boy.

Tea arrived. He seemed to grow more nervous, and his cup took one or two perilous slides across the saucer.

"Do take that little table. That's right. We are not going to be formal after your pulling me out of the river. I never ought to have trusted myself to that child's vanity."

"Very inconsiderate of him," said Ritson, stirring his tea furiously. "Not your brother, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. He would not have been showing off. And I have to play Lady Teazle to-night."

Ritson stared.

"I don't think I quite—"

"I'm an actress. I don't suppose you have heard of Marjory Lutterel."

He hadn't, but he swore that he had. And there was a sudden stirring of human pride and vanity within him. He—Thomas Ritson—was having tea with an actress after saving her from drowning! It sounded melodramatic.

"I'm here for the week," she told him. "I always take these rooms when I come to Cambridge. We are just finishing a tour."

He was a very good young man, and he had always imagined actresses to be painted creatures with no morals; but this particular actress had been washed in the Cam, and had come forth looking fresh and charming.

She noticed his shy, puzzled, interested look.

"I suppose you think me a frivolous woman!"

"Oh, not at all. I have a great admiration—for the stage."

"Thank you. Have you ever seen me act?"

He lied, but with some hesitation; and she knew that he was lying.

"Now, don't try to be polite."

"Really, Miss Lutterel—I—"

"You have never seen me act. Don't be ashamed of it. I have never seen you give a demonstration on a frog's brain or a fossil, and I'm not ashamed of it. But let me give you a little hint: when you do tell a lie, tell it aggressively, with enthusiasm. And you may come and see me act—to-night."

He smiled apologetically.

"I shall be delighted. I mean it."

"I have a 'stall' that I can give you. And, if you like, you can send me up a bouquet."

The idea thrilled him. He had heard of such things being done, but he had never seen himself doing them. But why not? It seemed rather impressive, adventurous—more impressive than teaching youngsters to dissect frogs.

Marjory Lutterel had treated him playfully, but Thomas Ritson took that plunge into romance with all the seriousness of a man who had neglected to cultivate a sense of humour. He went round to the best flower shop in Cambridge, and ordered a very expensive bouquet to be sent to his rooms by seven o'clock that evening. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he ought to dress, and he rushed out again to buy a white tie.

He drove to the theatre with a small mountain of roses on the seat beside him. He did not quite know how to handle that portentous bouquet. Ought he to leave it with the theatre staff to be presented at the correct moment, or should he take it into the stalls with him and hurl it on to the stage?

A small crowd of undergrads held the pavement as Ritson's cab drew up. He emerged self-consciously, holding the mass of roses to his breast. The irrepressibles cheered him. Moreover, there were two or three of Ritson's "cubs" in the crowd, and they were exultant and amazed.

"Good Lord, it's the Dormouse, old Ritson!"

"Yoicks, yoicks! Alice in Wonderland! Why, he's woken up!"

Ritson blundered through the crowd somehow, and in the vestibule he ran up against the porter. He seized the chance of obtaining the advice of an expert.

"I say, I want this presented to Miss Lutterel. How do I do it?"

The porter was a man of phlegm.

"I could manage it for you, sir."

Ritson fumbled for half a crown.

"Then I'll leave it with you. Miss

Lutterel—you know, who's playing the part of Lady Teazle."

"You leave it to me, sir," said the porter judicially, accepting the half a crown.

He eyed Ritson sympathetically.

"You'll excuse me, sir, but your tie's come loose."

Ritson looked horrified.

"Oh, bother! Could I—"

"Just step round here, sir; I'll see to it."

So the porter adjusted Thomas Ritson's tie in a secluded corner, and then handed him on to the lady who had control of the stalls.

For the first quarter of an hour Mr. Ritson sat in a fever of self-consciousness on account of that confounded tie. He put up a surreptitious hand every now and again to discover if the thing was behaving itself as it should. The porter had done his work efficiently, and Ritson's anxiety gradually evaporated.

Then his river nymph arrived on the stage, and the little science demonstrator sat and watched her with a kind of delighted incredulity. He thought her marvellous. She simply drew the soul out of him and dangled it on a thread.

And all the while an exultant and astonished voice kept challenging him. "I—jumped into the river and rescued—her! I had tea with her this afternoon! I came in here with—her—ticket! My—bouquet is going to be handed up to her presently!" He was a new man. He had tumbled into a tale of Dumas. The spirit of D'Artagnan woke in him; he wanted to play with a sword instead of with a scalpel.

Once he fancied that she had picked him out, and that she smiled. He felt himself to be the most important person in the house. Why hadn't he invited her to supper—invited the whole company to supper? Of course, they would have expected champagne, and he knew nothing at all about wine.

He waited, trembled, for that bouquet to be presented. Supposing the porter forgot it? He went out between the acts to make sure, and the man of phlegm stared critically at his tie, and reassured him.

"It's holding nicely, sir."

"I mean—about those flowers?"

"Don't you worry, sir; they'll go on after the last curtain when the call comes."

And so they did. A man in the orchestra handed them up. The applause struck Ritson as immense; it

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had a personal note. Marjory Lutterel was bowing, smiling; she looked in his direction, and bowed again. He felt that he ought to get up and bow in return; that everybody must know that it was his bouquet; that he was something of a hero.

"Good old Dormouse!"

"Isn't he a nice boy, Alice!"

The cries came from up above, and some of the exultation melted out of Ritson's soul. So they called him Dormouse, did they! He wondered why.

He walked home trying to reassure himself. Dormouse, indeed! He had pulled an actress out of the river; he had had tea with her. These facts were incontestable. And then he found that beastly tie dangling on his shirt front! The illusion vanished. There was something wrong with the world.

Thomas Ritson was far from being his normal, scientific self next day. The work of the academic year was over; in a few days everybody would be going down; he himself had had ideas of transferring himself to some German University and attending the

lectures of the most learned of the Teutons. But even the fame of such men as Weismann and Haeckel seemed rather pale and unsatisfying that morning. He was chiefly interested in wondering whether he might ask Miss Lutterel and some friend of hers to tea.

He forgot that dress tie, and, acting with boldness, called at her rooms about eleven o'clock.

He had written a note in case she should be out. The note was not needed; he was asked to come upstairs.

She was lying on the sofa in that selfsame blue kimono, and the whole room smelt of roses. She was alone, and her smile was very friendly.

"How good of you to send all those flowers. I have never had a finer bouquet."

He blushed, blushed rosily, like a boy of seventeen, and there was something rather attractive about his embarrassment. He might be very sure of himself in a museum, but in the presence of such a woman as Marjory Lutterel he was naively self-conscious.



"He sat down, his straw hat between his knees"

Gassell's Magazine of Fiction

"Oh, it was a pleasure! And I enjoyed your acting immensely. Sheridan had a pretty wit. I'm sure I ought to see more plays than I do."

His nervousness did not strike her as ridiculous. The ultra-modern poise, so full of languid and condescending assurance, bored her a little.

"I wish I could retaliate, and say that I ought to see more chemical experiments—and fossils!"

He laughed.

"I've had to work awfully hard, you know. I've been wondering whether you—you and one of your friends—would care to come to tea with me in my rooms—"

He floundered as though it had suddenly occurred to him that his invitation was a preposterously dull one.

"I've got rooms in the college. I could show you the chapel—and the library. It doesn't sound very exciting, does it? But if you care to come this afternoon—if you have nothing better to do—"

She looked at him reflectively.

"Of course, I should like to come. I'm afraid all my friends—the whole company, in fact—have hired a launch and are going on the river."

His face fell.

"I see. That sounds much pleasanter—"

"But I'm not going; I had enough of the Cam yesterday. I will come and have tea with you."

She saw his abrupt and donnish embarrassment. A college lecturer entertaining an actress—alone—in his college rooms! She rescued him from the dilemma.

"But wouldn't it be pleasanter if we went out to tea. And you could take me for a walk afterwards and show me some of the sights."

He was blushing again in that virginal way of his.

"Would you care to—really?"

"Of course."

"Then may I call for you here—say, about four o'clock?"

"Yes."

He went home, and ordered in a tankard of audit ale for lunch. It seemed a suitable sort of beverage; he had indulged in it once or twice when he had scored some great academic triumph. But he had never felt so triumphant before, so elated. This was life—glory.

And then doubts and vacillations fell upon him. He stood in his little bedroom, dressing, and for the first time in his life he felt like quarrel-

ling with his boots. What broad-toed, creased, bourgeois-looking beasts they were, black as negroes, with frayed laces! He found himself wishing that he had a brown pair. Well, why not! He rushed out and bought them, and when he got them on at home he was frightened by their copper-coloured newness.

Then his tie gave him a shock. He rummaged in a drawer and discovered an inoffensive pearly grey. It struck a graver, more mediæval, architectural note. But when he had it tied he discovered displeasure in his collar. Surely his neck was longer than most people's necks! Still, he could not cut a section out of it and so remedy the blemish!

As for Marjory Lutterel, she too had a very delicate perception of the subtleties of dress. She put on her quietest frock and a demure little hat. A dark blue sunshade and grey suede shoes completed the colour scheme.

"Heavens!" she thought. "I believe I should frighten him to death if I turned out in cerise!"

He was more shy and more self-conscious than ever that afternoon. She had to do all the talking during tea, yet the effort did not bore her. It was so evident that he thought her a transcendent and very wonderful creature that she could forgive him his inarticulateness, perhaps, because she had more than a suspicion that he was no fool.

They wandered out into the "backs," found a shady seat, and took possession. She found him much less shy now that he was alone with her, even ready to talk intimately about himself.

"I suppose you will stay here all your life, growing more and more learned?"

The assumption seemed to depress him.

"I hope not."

"You have other plans?"

"Oh, yes. I want to travel, to explore, to do original work. I suppose it is the Darwin idea; he was a pioneer and scientific backwoodsman, you know, full of adventure."

She glimpsed him in a new light.

"Hallo! You have ambitions!"

He blushed.

"I suppose so."

"Then why not go ahead?"

"Well, you see, somehow I can't get the billets I want. I applied for an Antarctic expedition, and they wouldn't have me. Then I tried for an expedition that was going explor-

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ing in Brazil, but it was no use. I don't know why; I know my work—I'm keen."

Her eyes were motherly for the moment. She reflected, and fancied that she understood.

He went on.

"I have had a hint given me that Baron Bernstein is taking out a research party to New Guinea. I know him slightly. I am going up to London next week, and I think I shall try my luck with him."

"Of course. We go back to town at the end of the week, and I shall be there for a month or two."

"Shall you?"

His eyes betrayed him most innocently.

"I wonder if I might see you in London?"

She drew patterns with the point of her parasol.

"I think you might. You know, Mr. Ritson, we have known each other only two days. I ought to tell you I am a rather hard and worldly young woman. I'm ambitious, and I have rather a sharp tongue."

He looked surprised.

"I should not have thought it."

She laughed.

"Only when I trouble—when I am interested in people or inclined to be fond of them. Like the Deity, I chasten those I love! And—do you know?—I am rather interested in you."

His redness was phenomenal.

"I don't know why you should be. It's awfully good of you."

"Then you don't accept my interest in you as a matter of course, just a usual thing, as an inevitable tribute to your genius?"

"How could I? It astonishes me."

"Very well, that decides it. I will let you see me in London. And do you know what I am going to do?"

"No."

His expression suggested that he could not presume to decipher the activities of such an inexplicable and supramundane creature.

"I am going to ponder your case. I have told you that I am a very worldly young woman, and I am going to bring my worldly wisdom to bear on your career. Somehow you don't seem to be the success you desire to be."

He nodded gravely.

"I fail somewhere. It's as though I didn't impress people. I shall be awfully grateful."

"Even if I say cutting, critical things?"

"I shall be sure that you are being sincere."

"Perhaps I shall put you to the test."

* * * * *

A week later Thomas Ritson found himself walking beside her across the Horse Guards Parade. They entered St. James's Park, loitered a while to watch a crowd of urchins dragging for sticklebacks with tin cans, and then chose two green chairs that stood apart under the shade of a tree.

"Well, have you considered my case?"

She looked at him with frank eyes.

"Yes."

"I'm ready to listen."

"But I must warn you that I shall not be gentle. You may think me detestable, impertinent."

He was immensely in earnest.

"No. I want you to be absolutely truthful. I've been thinking a good deal since I first met you, and I can tell you I have been depressed about myself."

"Then I may hurt you rather badly."

"I'm ready to bear it."

Her eyes lit up.

"Let's get it over. Why are you so abominably careless about your clothes?"

He seemed to straighten in his chair like a man who has been worrying over a problem and has had the solution suddenly thrust under his nose.

"I hoped you would ask me that. It has been worrying me. Do you think they are very bad?"

"Shocking!"

"Please give me examples."

"I'm afraid—everything is wrong."

He was quite excited.

"That's it. I've had no personal vanity; that's what has been challenging me for the last seven days."

She compelled herself to be calm, judicial.

"It is not only a question of clothes. You have never learnt to swagger a little, to ride the high horse. You have sat in a chair too much; men who sit in chairs don't win in the scramble for the big jobs."

He answered her soberly:

"I expect that's true."

Then he brightened.

"Now prescribe for me. It's not a question of money; I have done fairly well."

She gave a queer little laugh.

"I think I shall have to dress you. Will you mind?"

"No."

Cassell's Magazine of Fiction

"Do you belong to a club?"

"No."

"Join one. Mix with the men there. And can you ride?"

"No."

"Take lessons at once. Can you shoot?"

"No."

"Well, learn to. Go to one of the big gun shops and get them to teach you at their private school."

He seemed to ponder her words.

"You must think me a terrible muff!" he said at last.

"Perhaps, I do. Isn't that brutal of me. But I told you that I should be brutal."

She watched him curiously, with deepening interest. It was a pretty shrewd test of his temper and of that moral courage that goes to the making of a man. He sat there silently, frowning, facing the unflattering picture she had given him of himself.

Then he looked at her with a sudden smile in his eyes.

"That's it. You have solved the problem. I suppose I have had the reputation of a learned milksop. Well, I'll change it."

Her eyes flashed to his.

"Well done! And you don't bear me any malice?"

"No; I'm grateful to you."

"Then you are a very unusual man."

For the first time since she had known him he showed a sense of humour.

"Miss Lutterel, you will have to accept a very heavy responsibility. You will have to choose my ties for me."

"My dear sir, I am going to do a great deal more than that. I am going to supervise the whole of your new wardrobe, and I am going to teach you to crow."

She was as good as her word, and that very afternoon she took him to certain West-End shops and acted as demonstrator in front of the windows. He was sent into a fashionable tailor's with definite directions as to suits and patterns, and she had to be very positive on the subject of tweeds. Then he bought collars, ties, socks, a Homburg hat and a new bowler, and she assisted personally in judging the hats. She turned him into a bootshop, with further instructions as to what was ambitious and what was not. And, last of all, she tactfully suggested that he would look much more impressive if he had that ruffed-up hair on his forehead shorn of some of its glory.

Thomas Ritson was being tested, and

he stood it extraordinarily well. This young woman was demanding that he should turn himself inside out, rearrange his whole attitude towards life, and pour contempt on old familiar habits. Had he loved himself too jealously he might have been fiercely enraged by her blunt criticisms. But Ritson had the makings of a man in him; moreover, he had fallen in love.

It was extraordinary the way he developed under her encouragement; it was not merely the outer man that took on a new activity. She gave him élan, self-confidence, new ambitions. There was a change in the set of his shoulders and the way he carried his head.

One morning she strolled into Hyde Park along by the Row. He had asked her to meet him there, and he came to keep the meeting on a smart saddle-horse.

He flushed boyishly.

"You see, I am getting on. They let me out alone now."

She had begun to find him very attractive. His naiveté and the way he had trusted her appealed to her very strongly.

"Do you know, I am quite proud of you?"

"I am getting proud of myself. I feel a different sort of man. I seem to be getting a new grip of life."

He sat his horse convincingly; his eyes were more alert; his clothes were just what they should be.

"I think you are doing splendidly."

"Do you? I have to thank you for it. By the way, I hear the Baron's New Guinea expedition is to come off. I think of trying my luck."

"Splendid! Of course you must try. And how is the shooting getting on?"

He smiled happily.

"I came near scoring 'possibles' yesterday with the rifle. And I am getting deadly at clay pigeons."

"Excellent."

When he had cantered off she watched him with a kind of personal pride. The transfiguration had been extraordinary, and he had shown such a splendid temper.

Then came the day when he rushed radiantly, exultantly into her little flat.

"I've got it, Marjory! By Jove, I've got it!"

"Got what, my dear boy?"

"That post of Bernstein's. He wrote to me to call on him, and we seemed to shake down at once. He wanted to know if I could ride and shoot."

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Her eyes reflected his triumph.
"Hurrah! You can't think how glad I am! Let's go out and have a champagne lunch."

But he had more to say.

"Yes, we'll celebrate. But I want to thank you, Marjory. I owe all this to you."

"Nonsense, you had the pluck to do what I suggested. Most men would have been furious."

"I couldn't have been furious with you. You have made a new man of me. I am going to make a name for myself, and when I come back—well, I shall know where to bring the trophies."

They went forth and celebrated, and if Thomas Ritson was in love with Marjory Lutterel, it was not impossible that she had begun to care for him.

But once again he showed himself a sportsman.

"I have got to win my spurs, Marjory, and I am going to do it. You'll write to me, won't you? And when I come back—I shall ask you to let me tell you something."

"Yes, I'll write to you," she said, "and I'll wait to hear what you have to say."

* * * *

Thomas Ritson went with Baron Bernstein's scientific adventurers to New Guinea, and did great work there, not only as a scientist but as a man. Some of the pluckiest deeds pass unnoticed, but Ritson won a reputation for himself that lived in the memories of those who shared in that rather unfortunate expedition. He returned to England with a great white scar on his forehead, and a notebook crammed with all manner of original observations. But he had found his career—and he knew it.

Moreover, he returned to find the woman who had inspired him. Lying in need of all that the man in him could give. Marjory Lutterel had been ill with one of those desperate, lingering illnesses that leave careers broken

and ambitions crushed. In all her letters to him she had never betrayed the truth, and he had always thought of her as a triumphant creature whom disaster could not touch.

He found her in a cheap little flat in one of the southern suburbs, a pale woman with brave eyes and white, transparent hands. She gave him a gay welcome, and laughed at her changed surroundings.

"But what has happened? You have been ill."

"Oh, laid up for a while, and studying economics."

She tried to make light of it, but Thomas Ritson was a very different man from the Thomas Ritson who had left England more than a year ago. He had come by a new masterfulness; he was not going to be put off with pretences.

He was very gentle, despite his firmness, and in the end she had to confess that life had been bitter for her, and hard to bear.

He asked her to marry him.

She refused.

"No; I am not going to let you sacrifice yourself, Tom."

"Oh, nonsense. You will be strong again in time. I mean you to be strong."

"No; I'm thinking of your career."

She was lying in an arm-chair by the window, and he sat on the arm of the chair and held her hand.

"Look here, Marjory, you have made my career. I have done well out there, and all those months I have been gloating over the thought of bringing you back the trophies. I owe everything to you, and I love you—that's the simplest fact of all. If you refuse to let me take care of you, I shall go back to Cambridge, and revert to the dull little man—"

She smiled up at him.

"I can't let you do that, Tom."

"Well, that settles it. You have got to finish your job, dear. I'm not complete yet."

A SAW WITHOUT TEETH

You cannot eat your cake and have it too.
That's old and trite enough and maybe true,
But saving pastry doesn't always pay.
A cake grown stale must needs be thrown away.

You cannot eat your cake and have it? So?
Who else would have it, then, I'd like to know?
Despite the wise old saw, 'tis wiser, brother,
To eat your cake and scramble for another!

Miss Smith

Done

*The proper study of mankind is man, and
plain Miss Smith, obeying that injunction,
upset some other people's plans*

By Warwick Deeping

THE Calais - Paris express steamed into the Gare du Nord, and Mrs. Godbold issued her last instructions: "Be sure not to leave the carriage, Miss Smith. Get yourself a supper basket, and look out for us at the Gare de Lyon."

The Godbold family filed out into the corridor, mother and three daughters, and Miss Smith was left in a carriage littered with hand-luggage, cushions, and magazines. She smiled, for the situation was novel and suggestive. She had been a governess in the Godbold family for little more than a month; it had been a study in the suppression of the individual; but Miss Smith was not an ordinary young woman, and she was very far from being suppressed. Even Mrs. Godbold could not deprive her of an exquisite and veiled sense of humour.

She glanced round the carriage.

"So this is the lot of the dependent gentlewoman. To spend two hours crawling round the circular route, guarding the luggage, while the divinities rush across Paris in a taxi, and dine comfortably at the restaurant. And I am to be content with a cardboard box that contains a hard yellow roll, slabs of ham, a bit of cold chicken, and two apples!"

The guard came along, and Miss Smith addressed him in French.

"You will be in the carriage, monsieur, while the train is in the station?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I am going to dine here at the restaurant. Will you see that the hand-luggage is not interfered with?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle."

She tipped him, but it was not the money that made this good Frenchman so ready to oblige her. She had that indefinable "air" that can suggest something more charming than a mere command. To the Godbolds the new governess was something of an enigma.

Mrs. Godbold had confessed that Miss Smith possessed a much better "appearance" than such young women were expected to present. She dressed very simply in black. The colour suited her dark eyes and the reserved cleverness of her pale face.

Miss Smith dined at the restaurant, and rounded off the meal with coffee and a liqueur. Mrs. Godbold would never have imagined that a governess could know that such superfluities as liqueurs were in existence, but then Mrs. Godbold was a very ignorant woman.

"Snobs—perfection in snobs!"

Miss Smith smiled at her empty liqueur glass.

"Fate has provided me with some magnificent specimens. It is quite worth it. One has to live with the bourgeoisie to appreciate their incongruities."

She bought herself a French novel at the bookstall, and fared round to the Gare de Lyon, where the Godbold family re-invaded the carriage and prepared for the night's journey south.

Mrs. Godbold insisted on taking an inventory of everything in the carriage. She was a big woman with a high colour and a fine bust; her daughters were confident, upstanding wenches; Mabel, the eldest, had nothing to learn from anybody; Gladys and Joan were supposed to be capable of imbibing culture from Miss Smith.

"Where is my air-cushion? I don't see it."

Miss Smith suggested that Mrs. Godbold was sitting on it.

"To be sure, so I am. Is the tea basket under the seat?"

"All right, ma; don't worry."

"I never worry, my dear."

"We might be settling down for the night."

"Let's spread things about; that middle seat isn't reserved; we won't have anybody else in."

"Would you mind pulling down those

MISS SMITH

blinds, Miss Smith? We don't want Frenchmen staring in here."

For the next half hour Rosamund Smith played the part of nursemaid to the family. She saw them tucked away in the four corners, each with rugs and pillows.

"Oh! and turn that horrid *chauffage* off."

"And you can pull down the shades over the lamp."

She was free at last to settle herself in one of the centre seats, feeling like a hospital nurse on night duty, to be made use of upon the least provocation.

So the express bore them southwards into the night, Miss Smith being roused up at one in the morning to unbutton Mrs. Godbold's boots.

"One never can regulate the heat in these French trains. Yes, it makes one's feet swell. Of course, all this is new to you, Miss Smith?"

This particular experience was a novelty, but all next day Miss Rosamund Smith had to conceal a knowledge of the Riviera coast that might not have been comforting to the Godbold ladies. They were tired, and on edge, and inclined to be fretful. Miss Smith knew that Mrs. Godbold expected her to be in raptures, not only with the scenery, but with the beneficent Godboldian Providence that permitted her, a governess, to sun herself on the French Riviera.

"Monte Carlo, Miss Smith, Monte Carlo!"

Mrs. Godbold looked over the tops of her pince-nez. It was as though she expected Miss Smith to thrill with awe at the very thought of passing through that sunny centre of sin.

Monte Carlo! And Mrs. Godbold! Miss Smith's sense of humour held secret revelry.

So Miss Smith found herself established in the Hotel St. Christopher at Mentone, and the occupant of a poky little bedroom under the tiles. Moreover, she was taught to realise that there was a certain Godboldian economy discoverable in the bringing of a governess to the Riviera; she was expected to act as lady's-maid to the family, to darn and sew, to go out and buy milk and cakes for afternoon tea, to make the tea, and wash up afterwards. She did not quarrel with the conditions, but she did

resent the way the Godbold family enforced them.

A week passed uneventfully. The girls joined the tennis club; there were expeditions into the hills, to St. Agnes and Castellar; hats were bought in the town, and a few francs lost at the Casino. The hotel was distinctly dull. There was not a marriageable man in residence, which was tragical, for Mabel Godbold was ripe for a career, and Gladys, though she still received French and German lessons from Miss Smith, had her hair up and was to be taken seriously by everybody.

Then the great event happened. A new name went up on the visitors' board in the hall. Miss Smith happened to see Mabel Godbold scrutinising it with interest. The other girls also made the discovery. At lunch there was a tremor of excitement in the air.

Rosamund Smith had taken the trouble to walk to the green board and read the name of the new-comer.

"Sir Lucas Cranston."

A baronet! Yes, Mrs. Godbold happened to know that he was a baronet. She even made ingenious inquiries at the bureau, putting forward the plea that a Cranston had married a second cousin of hers about twenty years ago.

He arrived by the afternoon train, and it was Miss Smith who had the first glimpse of him. He walked into the lounge as though he had just strolled into his London club—a tallish, keen-faced man of forty or so, clean-shaven, dark-haired, with an air that suggested that life amused him.

"Have you got my room? Thank you."

It was a pleasant voice. He glanced at Miss Smith in passing, but he did not look at anyone else.

The Godbold family was very decorative that evening. Mabel had put on her white dinner dress, the dress with the cerise ribbons. Gladys was in pale yellow, Joan in blue, Mrs. Godbold in Venetian red. Miss Smith continued in black; it was a simple French dress, to be appreciated only by a man of the world.

Sir Lucas was given a table near them. Miss Smith could feel the Godbold family palpitating with feminine curiosity. Once or twice he glanced across at them, but

his eyes always happened to meet the eyes of Miss Smith.

The Godbolds discussed him with suppressed enthusiasm.

"He's quite young."

"I wonder if he plays tennis?"

"He may be staying only a few days."

Mrs. Godbold maintained a Roman reserve.

"You must bring your songs down to-night, Mabel," she said. "I am sure the hotel would like some music."

But Miss Mabel Godbold did not succeed in luring Sir Lucas Cranston out of the smoking-room where he sat smoking a cigar and reading the *Hibbert Journal*. The Godbold ladies waited patiently, yet with animation, but the baronet did not arrive.

The Godbolds came of aggressive and pushful ancestors. These young women were determined and confident, but it was the mother-tiger who captured the baronet for her cubs. Elderly ladies are allowed to drop books and vanity-bags at critical and opportune moments, and to follow up an advantage when the male thing picks up the bag or the book. Little courtesies are followed by little casual conversations, then, with every appearance of innocence, a daughter drifts up and slips into the affair.

At the end of a week the Godbold girls were playing tennis with Sir Lucas Cranston. They were healthy, strenuous young Philistines, rather overbold in their attitude towards men. The whole hotel watched the drama, and gradually the hotel noticed things that the Godbolds failed to observe.

Miss Smith did not play tennis. She seemed to be a great reader, and there was a certain corner of the garden, a little thatched shelter backed by a grove of orange trees, that became her favourite retreat. And on one particular morning when the Misses Godbold had gone down in a body to buy stuffs for a fancy dress ball, the baronet was observed strolling in the direction of Miss Smith's retreat. The significance of his tendency was marked by the fact that he had watched the governess down the path that led through the orange grove.

Miss Smith was sitting there alone when he made the casual appearance of a man exploring at his leisure. He seemed surprised to find her there.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

There were two vacant chairs. He took one and sat down.

"Great preparations for to-morrow night, I hear."

She closed her book. A smile seemed to be hiding in the deeps of her eyes.

"Youth must be humoured."

He was amused.

"Oh, come now, you are not in a position to play the grandmother."

"You must remember my responsibilities. Responsibility ages us very quickly."

"Does it? Well, I have had my share of it, and I feel like five-and-twenty. And since you look five-and-twenty, I am driven to the conclusion that you have not carried your present responsibilities for very long."

She looked at him with tantalising seriousness. He had a delicate touch, and she admired the diplomat in the man.

"I shall not tell you how long I have held my present—situation."

"No. Women are incredibly patient. By the way, are you going to appear in costume?"

"No one has suggested it."

"I see."

"And you?"

She liked the way his face wrinkled when he smiled.

"I shall leave it to the young people. You and I are much too serious."

"No doubt. I am glad you are able to do justice to my seriousness."

They fenced with each other for half an hour, enjoying the zest of attacking and being attacked. She knew that he was interested, puzzled. What greater compliment could a woman desire? He wanted to discover things for himself without blundering into the crudities of a cross-examination.

Then he had the tact to remember that he had letters to write, and he left her, strolling on through the orange grove and returning to the hotel garden by another path.

Then he discovered Mrs. Godbold sitting in the sunshine with her embroidery on her knees. She beamed at him, and he fetched a chair and sat down near her.

"I hear there is to be a very gay affair to-morrow night?"

"Yes, for the young people."

"Does that include the whole hotel?"

"Everybody who feels young, Sir Lucas."

"I see. Then I am afraid I cannot be included."

He had every appearance of being serious; in fact, he looked rather melancholy and depressed.

Mrs. Godbold scrutinised him with motherly eyes.

"I regard you as quite a young man, Sir Lucas."

"Do you? What a mockery!"

He stared sadly at the toe of his right boot. Mrs. Godbold rallied him.

"Of course you are a young man, Sir Lucas."

"I am forty."

"A mere nothing."

"And a bachelor. Bachelors age prematurely. Haven't you observed that?"

Mrs. Godbold had not observed it, but she had a remedy to suggest, and she smiled at him archly.

"Then it is obvious, Sir Lucas, that you ought to marry."

"Marry! Good heavens! Excuse me. Certainly that is an idea. I suppose bachelors grow abominably selfish, and selfishness ages one. I should feel rather shy of offering my middle-aged person to any woman under thirty."

Mrs. Godbold said, "Fudge!"

Then she softened the brusqueness of the exclamation.

"How could you get such an idea into your head, Sir Lucas? You ought to marry some bright, healthy girl; you would feel a different man."

And so the conversation developed into a discussion of *la jeune fille*, and ended in a confidential rhapsody of Mrs. Godbold upon her own girls

and their virtues. They were so healthy, so good-tempered, so unselfish; they had been brought up in a clean and happy English home; no money had been spared upon their education. Sir Lucas Cranston agreed with her most heartily, and again remembered that he had letters to write.

The following afternoon Miss Rosamund Smith had been down into the town to buy the daily cakes and milk for the Godbold tea. She was returning with a bottle of sterilised milk done up in a paper bag, a package of cakes, and a parcel of sugar and biscuits, when she heard footsteps behind her.

"Let me carry some of those things for you?"

"Oh, thank you very much, but I can manage."

He showed determination, and insisted on relieving her of the milk and the cakes. She was not aware of the fact that he had followed her deliberately and seized his chance.

"That's better. I feel quite a domesticated creature."

"Yes, your dignity survives, in spite of it."

"Thank you."

They passed under a mimosa-tree heavy with yellow bloom and scent.

"How delicious! I always love that perfume. On a drab day in England——"

She found him regarding her intently.

"So this is not your first swallow flight?"

She smiled. He was quick in attack.

"No."

"I thought so."

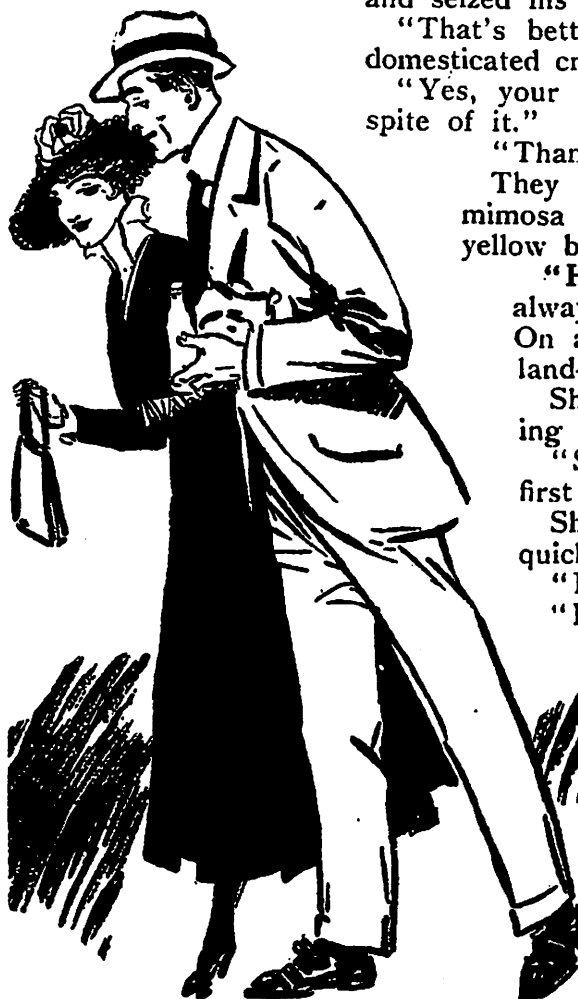
"Indeed! And why?"

"General impressions. Do you prefer this country to California?"

"California! Of course. I—have never been there."

"But have you?"

"Let me re-



He insisted on relieving her of the milk and the cakes

mind you, Sir Lucas, that I am a governess."

His eyes smiled.

"I know. But that does not dispose of my impressions. So California delighted you?"

"It did."

They reached the approach to the Hotel St. Christopher, a winding drive running between palms and eucalyptus trees, and their advance to the hotel had to be made under the eyes of quite a number of elderly and middle-aged ladies who were sunning themselves in the garden. Miss Smith watched Sir Lucas Cranston with sidelong interest. Would he flinch, show himself conscious of carrying that bottle of milk?

"Let me take that—now?"

"Oh, no; it doesn't bother me a bit."

Nor did it. He marched with her unconcernedly to the hotel doorway, not troubling to observe whether Mrs. Godbold happened to be among the interested gentlewomen who were watching him.

"I'll hand these things over—now."

He had won her whole-hearted approval.

"Thank you so much. I must hurry upstairs and get the family tea ready."

So far as certain persons were concerned, the fancy-dress ball that evening proved something of a fiasco. It was inconsiderate of Sir Lucas Cranston not to appear in costume; it was still more inconsiderate of him to retire to the lounge and to spend half an hour talking to Miss Smith. Mrs. Godbold was not pleased; such a lapse was inexplicable. "Diana," "Joan of Arc," and "Pierrette" were being partnered by an elderly major, a plump stockbroker, and a mild-eyed child from another hotel, while Sir Lucas Cranston ignored his duties, and chatted to a governess who did not even wear the dress of a Cinderella.

Mrs. Godbold was distinctly annoyed. She said nothing, for there was nothing to be said. It was a trivial coincidence, no doubt, but Miss Smith had not been engaged to talk to Sir Lucas Cranston. Mrs. Godbold treated her with suggestive hauteur the whole of the next day.

Then followed the incident of the Battle of Flowers. The Godbold girls had ordered a carriage, and Sir Lucas was invited to join them.

The carriage arrived at the hotel about

an hour after lunch. It was a study in white and rose, decorated with stocks and carnations, the spokes of the wheels bound with pink and white ribbons. Half the hotel gathered in the garden to see the Godbold ladies set out.

There were places for four. The three Godbold girls climbed in, and waited for Sir Lucas, but Sir Lucas appeared to be waiting for someone else.

"Where is Miss Smith? I can sit on the box."

"Miss Smith isn't coming."

"We shall be late."

"You can't sit on the box, Sir Lucas."

He proved obstinate, and there was a playful malice in his obduracy.

"Oh, yes, I can. Miss Smith must be made to come; she'll enjoy it."

He happened to know that she was dressed and ready, and, going in search of her, he found her in the music-room sitting at the piano.

"We are waiting for you."

She turned her head, but she did not rise from the piano.

"Oh, I am not expected to come."

"I have insisted on it."

"There will be—complications."

"Let them complicate as much as they please. I must have protection. Don't send an innocent man out at the mercy of those three young women."

She laughed, and surrendered.

"Very well, I will sacrifice myself. I was not asked to go."

"So I suspected. The authority is mine. My dear friend Mrs. Godbold will not dispute it."

Mrs. Godbold did not dispute it. Sir Lucas Cranston's authority foisted Miss Smith upon the party, and he himself ascended to the box. The Misses Godbold made no effort to welcome her; she was more than an intruder.

"You're sitting on my dress!"

"Don't take up so much room."

The Godbold girls bought flowers, baskets of them, but Miss Smith was not given a basket. Sir Lucas was rash enough to remedy the omission; no doubt he had reasons of his own.

That carnival of flowers left three young women in a very evil temper. The baronet had behaved abominably, and with utter indiscretion. Miss Smith drove home wearing a bunch of violets that he had bought her.

MISS SMITH

It was time for Mrs. Godbold to intervene, and intervene she did that evening, telling Miss Smith to follow her to her bedroom. Mrs. Godbold sat herself in the chair of judgment, and the comedy took on another phase.

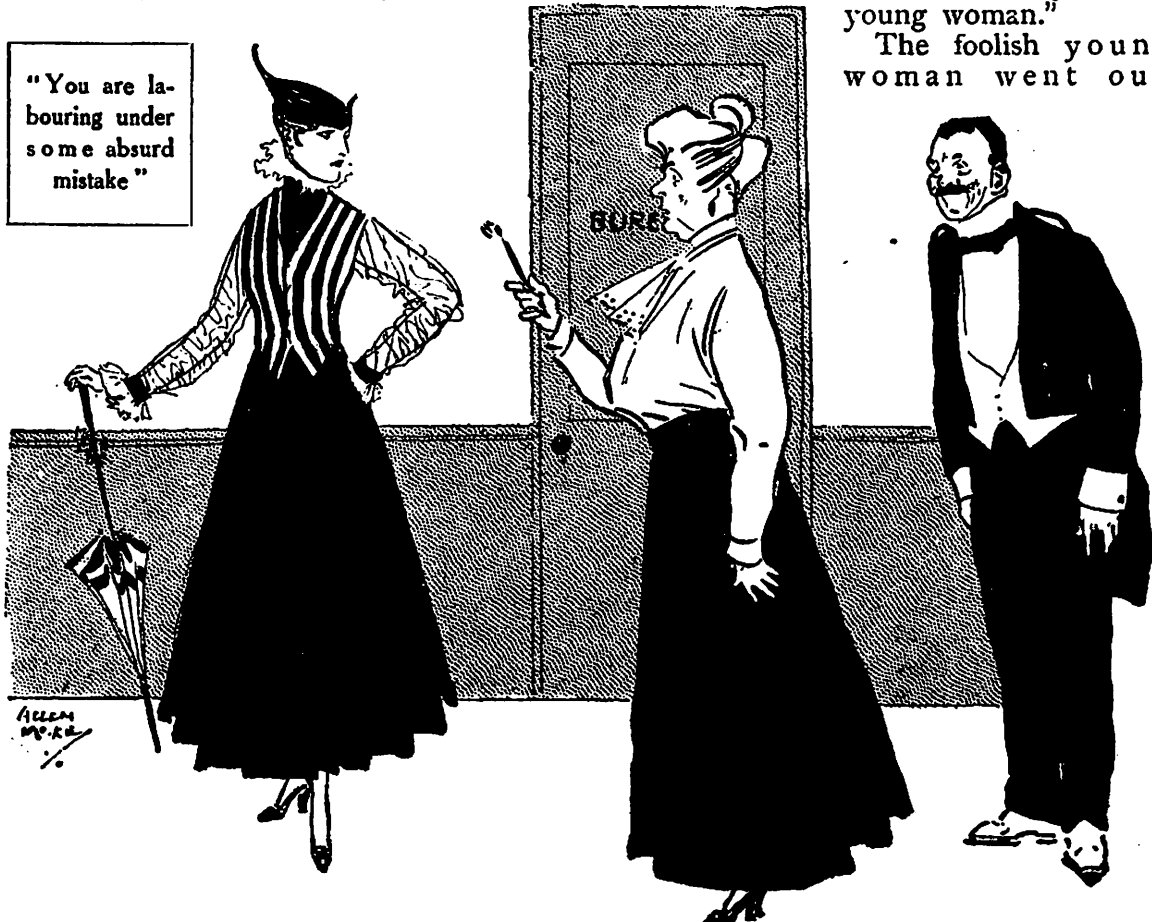
"I regret this necessity, Miss Smith, but it is my duty to warn you that you are behaving foolishly. I must request you to keep in your proper place."

Personally, I think it would be better for us to terminate our agreement. I am quite willing to surrender my post."

Mrs. Godbold gave her an angry stare. "So this is your gratitude. Very well, Miss Smith, I will take you at your word. You can leave us to-morrow. I will give you a month's salary, and second-class travelling expenses home.

You are a very foolish young woman."

The foolish young woman went out,



"I don't understand you, Mrs. Godbold."

"Of course you understand me. You are making yourself ridiculous by letting Sir Lucas Cranston amuse himself at your expense."

"I have never asked Sir Lucas to come and talk to me."

"Don't prevaricate. Do you think Sir Lucas would treat a young woman in your position—seriously? I am not at all pleased with your behaviour. I have brought you away on a delightful holiday—at great expense. I am thinking seriously of sending you home."

Miss Smith showed perfect equanimity.

"It rests with you, Mrs. Godbold.

restraining an intense desire to laugh. Her subsequent behaviour was deserving of severe censure, for she descended boldly into the lounge and made herself conspicuous by joining Sir Lucas Cranston, who had been keeping a chair vacant in the corner by the bureau.

"I don't know whether I shall see you again. I think you said that you were starting early to-morrow—for a long climb."

He looked at her questioningly.

"You are not going, are you?"

"Yes."

"But I had no idea that your people were moving."

"It is not that. I am the person who

happens to be going. I wanted to thank you for being kind to me. Now, I must go and pack."

He leant forward in his chair.

"Wait a moment. This is a very sudden development. You and madame have had a difference of opinion, Miss Smith?"

"Perhaps. I do not suit the family, and I am ordered home."

He was frowning.

"Oh, I see. Well, I shall not go climbing to-morrow. I shall come down and see you off, and Madame G. can go to——"

She laughed.

"No, no, not to that tropical place. Greenland would suit her better. Good night."

Miss Smith went to her room, locked the door, dragged her trunk out from under the bed, unlocked it, and, turning some clothes aside, lifted out a brown leather attaché case. She unlocked this also, and took from it a pocket-book. Sitting on the floor, she examined the contents of the pocket-book. It held French and English bank-notes to the value of fifty pounds, and also a book of promissory notes payable at Messrs. Baker's offices at Nice. It seemed an extraordinary thing that a governess should be in possession of so much money. Had Mrs. Godbold known of it she would have suspected Miss Smith of being an adventurer and a thief.

Miss Smith was down early; so was Sir Lucas. She had ordered the waiter to bring her coffee out into the garden, and she was making her breakfast at one of the little white-topped iron tables. Sir Lucas had his coffee carried out into the garden, and defied publicity by picking up a table and setting it down close to Miss Smith's.

Mabel Godbold, looking out of her bedroom, discovered the situation, and carried the news to Gladys' room. They peered down together, pretending to be infinitely amused.

"I wonder mother stood her so long. Just look at him leaning forward over his table!"

"What on earth makes him so polite to Smith?"

"She must have given him the glad eye. Do you know my idea?"

"No."

"She's met him before somewhere, and they had an affair."

Gladys was a very practical young person.

"Oh, bosh, he's only just amusing himself."

But Sir Lucas took his morning's fun with unusual seriousness. Rosamund Smith seemed very intent on her rolls and butter. She hardly looked at him, but she was smiling.

"I shall be back in England in three weeks."

"But I'm not going to England."

"Then, where on earth——?"

"Oh, not very far. Supposing I trust you with a secret?"

"Trust me—at once."

"I am coming back to Mentone in two or three days."

His face brightened; he fancied that he understood.

"Oh, I see. That's it, is it? Some nice old dowager has taken a fancy to you, and you are playing a little game on the Boldgods—Godbolds I mean."

"Yes."

"Where shall you be staying?"

"I will let you know that later."

Miss Smith got through her formal farewells; they were very formal with the Godbolds. Sir Lucas joined her in the hotel bus as it rattled her to the station. He had bought her flowers.

"Don't forget that I am playing in the comedy."

She blushed a little.

"No. I hope you will find it amusing."

For students of human nature life at the Hotel St. Christopher still had its little comedy, though the intrusive governess had been dismissed. The Misses Godbold did not venture to attack the baronet for three whole days; as for Sir Lucas, he appeared to have turned the smoking-room into a "funk pit," where he was moderately safe, and not likely to be blown into the air by any feminine shell. He went out on long expeditions, and came back just in time to dress for dinner. Observers imagined that he was eluding the Godbolds, an utterly erroneous conclusion, for he had almost forgotten that the Godbolds existed. He kept himself to himself because he happened to be in love.

Two days later a new name was posted

up on the green board in the hall. It aroused much interest and discussion.

"Lady Rosamund Saville is coming here."

"Indeed!"

"Isn't she the woman who wrote those very interesting books on the lives of the working women?"

"Yes. She has travelled a great deal. There was a delightful book of hers on South America."

"I have seen her photo somewhere; I can't remember where."

Mrs. Godbold made a prompt excursion to the local library, and managed to bring back one of Lady Rosamund's books. It was called "The Flowers of the Slums," and Mrs. Godbold thought it dangerously socialistic. She was sitting in the garden reading that very book when an open carriage turned in at the hotel gates, a carriage with red wheels drawn by a grey horse. Mrs. Godbold tilted her glasses and stared at the new arrival. A look of astonishment overspread her face, astonishment that was turgid with indignation.

Mrs. Godbold acted with decision. She hurried after the carriage, and confronted the occupant just as she was about to ascend the hotel steps after arranging with the concierge that he should pay the driver.

"Miss Smith——!"

A pair of calm but slightly surprised eyes looked into Mrs. Godbold's.

"I beg your pardon."

"What is the meaning of this? I demand some explanation."

The new-comer smiled.

"I think you are making some mistake. My name is not Smith. I don't think we know each other."

Mrs. Godbold's colour deepened.

"Indeed! I am not in a mood to be jested with. How is it that you have come back here?"

The new-comer frowned slightly; the concierge was grinning, and trying not to betray the fact that as an official he knew something of this transformation.

"Really, madam, you are labouring under some absurd mistake. My name is not Smith—it is Saville. I have just arrived from Nice."

"But you were my governess a week ago."

Lady Rosamund laughed.

"Indeed! Then I must have a very short memory, or I must bear a very extraordinary likeness to Miss Smith. I assure you I am convinced of my own identity."

She turned and walked up the steps, leaving Mrs. Godbold in a state of exasperated bewilderment.



Half an hour later Lady Rosamund Saville and Miss Mabel Godbold met in the lounge of the hotel. The girl had been playing tennis the greater part of the afternoon, and had not seen her mother since lunch.

Lady Rosamund was for walking past Miss Godbold as though she were the most absolute stranger, but the girl with the racquet was not to be daunted, and turned to the attack.

"What, you've come back?" she said acidly.

"I beg your pardon. Are you addressing your remarks to me?"

Her calm hauteur disconcerted Miss Godbold, who looked far from being at her ease.

"Really, I cannot remember having met you before. It is most extraordinary, but directly I arrived here an old

lady attacked me, declaring that I had been her governess. The Menton air must be rather fresh."

Mabel Godbold showed temper.

"Well, you are our Miss Smith. I suppose it's some sort of joke."

"Let me assure you that I am not Miss Smith."

"Then, who are you?"

"My name is Rosamund Saville. You will excuse me, but I am busy."

Mabel Godbold fled upstairs, and discovered her mother and sisters holding an emergency meeting in Mrs. Godbold's bedroom.

"I say, have you seen her?"

"Yes. Impertinent beast! Of course you will complain to the proprietor, ma."

"My dear, she says she is Lady Rosamund Saville. And in this book——"

She passed the copy of "The Flowers of the Slums" to her eldest daughter. The authoress figured on the frontispiece, and there was not a shadow of doubt but that the authoress was "Miss Smith."

"I only noticed the photo after I met the woman outside the hotel."

Mabel Godbold flung the book on the bed.

"Oh, Lord! what's it all mean?"

"It means that we have been imposed upon—imposed upon most disgracefully. I shall write at once to my lawyer."

Sir Lucas Cranston had been playing golf at Sospel. He strolled into the lounge about the time that most people were dressing for dinner, and made the great discovery that had so shocked Mrs. Godbold.

"Hallo! Why, Miss Smith, I never knew you were back here."

She was sitting there, reading, dressed in a pale rose-coloured gown. Her face flushed slightly, for his eyes betrayed what he felt.

"I think I must reintroduce myself. I am Lady Rosamund Saville. You see, I was masquerading; I wanted to study an English middle-class family at close quarters——"

"By George! have you seen the family?"

"Oh, yes, but I absolutely refused to remember that I ever was Miss Smith. It has led to a most amusing situation. They were a little bewildered."

"Bewildered! Ye gods!"

In a few hours the whole hotel had realised what had happened. The affair was exquisite, delicious, also too provoking. Lady Rosamund Saville had no memories of Miss Smith. She was just the aristocrat, very charming, a clever woman of the world. The Godbolds went about looking like prisoners in an enemy's country.

Then, one morning, half the hotel saw Lady Rosamund and Sir Lucas start on a mountain climb together. They carried their lunch with them. Everyone guessed what was about to happen.

High up on the hills among the olive groves two people went hand in hand.

"You know, Jack, I feel as though I have treated those poor people rather shamefully."

"Nonsense; they deserved it."

"I think I shall try and make friends when we get back."

But that chance was denied her. When the lovers returned to the Hotel St. Christopher the Godbolds had fled.

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By Warwick Deeping



ILLARS of white and pillars of red; pillars of rose and pillars of purple; green life in a green valley; glimpses of wooded hills; glimpses of white clouds and of blue sky.

I lay in my bed in the farmhouse while that broken leg of mine was mending, and when books bored me I watched the masses of climbing roses in the garden, the shadows playing on the grass when the sun shone and the wind moved in the trees. The folk who lived in the farm-house had been very good to me. They had set my bed close to the window. They feasted me on fresh fruit and hot milk.

But for three days I had been very restless. It was the voice that had broken the calm of that luxurious month of reading, eating, dreaming, and sleeping. It was the voice of someone who came down the lane about eight o'clock each morning, the lane that passed close under the red wing-end of the house. An old hedger was trimming the hedges along the lane. Each morning he passed some remark to the woman who went by, and that is how the voice had come to me.

"Bit thund'ry, miss; I reckon we be goin' ter have a storm."

"Yes; the sky looks stormy."

He varied his salutation; added a more personal touch to it.

"I suppose you be fond o' the freshness o' the morning."

"I suppose so."

There seemed a sorrowful acceptance of some tragic thing in life that contrasted with the old man's chirruping curiosity. The voice disturbed me very strangely. The words and the way she uttered them kept repeating themselves all day. The voice was very mellow, very clear, but infinitely sad.

I could not see the lane from where I lay, and a most haunting curiosity took possession of me. I wanted to see the

owner of the voice; the desire was most absurdly insistent.

"I say, nurse, can't I have my bed shifted?"

The big, grey-haired woman looked at me with tolerant good-humour.

"Tired of the view?"

"Well, I should like to see the other side of it."

"I'll ask the doctor when he comes."

"That's quite superfluous. Ask Mr. Jackson to come up and help you to reverse the landscape."

I had my way. The farmer's big, freckled hands were brought to help in the business. They turned the bed so that I could see the lane.

"How's that? You'll get a view of the crowded life of the neighbourhood."

I did not tell them that I wanted to see who passed.

"Hallo! I can watch up the lane, and your hedge having its hair cut."

"It isn't exactly thrilling," said the farmer reflectively; "but still—it's a bit of life."

I woke at about five o'clock next morning, and watched the greyness of the dawn change to gold and green and blue. My desire to see the owner of the voice was quite illogical, even foolish. I remember reasoning with myself, and saying: "What an ass you are! If she happens to be plain and over forty, you will have had your bed turned round for nothing."

About seven o'clock the old hedger's black slouch hat and dust-coloured coat appeared in the lane. I saw him lighting a clay pipe. Then his bagging-hook began to flash in the early sunlight; he was working farther away, where the lane dipped over the edge of the hill.

I had closed my eyes for a moment when I heard his cheery, chirrupy salutation.

"A powerful heavy dew, miss, this mornin'."

And so it was. The green world was drenched with it, and the hedgerows and the grass glistened. And between the green walls came the woman whom I had waited

to see, the woman whose voice had troubled me.

She was dressed in a simple, rose-coloured linen dress, and she wore no hat, but carried a fawn-coloured sunshade, unopened, in one hand. Her face was round and pale, her hair jet-black. Her eyes looked into the distance as though she were waiting for something and did not notice anything that was very near.

"She's just like the voice!"

I suppose such a smash-up as I had had makes a man more sensitive, but I sat up boldly in bed and stared at her as though she were destiny.

"You're not more than eight-and-twenty. What's the tragedy?"

I found myself talking to her in a queer, intimate way.

"Hang Bernard Shaw! If a woman looks pale and sad, need it be because she does not get enough food?"

She was quite close to the house, and I was staring at her with concentrated curiosity. Of course, she glanced up. Something vital in her had reacted to the vital wonder in me.

Just for a moment her eyes met mine with a startled and half-displeased directness. She glanced away with a suggestion of self-consciousness. Then she disappeared behind the big lilac bush that grew at the end of the house.

I waited, strangely excited. In about half an hour she passed back up the lane; but I saw no more than the soft, rose outlines of her figure, and the unforgettable way her white neck met the blackness of her hair.

I lay back and wondered.

Who was she? Where did she live? Why did she come down the lane each morning?

These questions were unanswerable, but I could supply a plausible explanation to the last. The village post office was about a quarter of an hour's walk from Windhover Farm. The postman went round by the other road, and did not link up the circle of his round till ten o'clock. Perhaps she went for letters. If so, what was the necessity?

For a week I saw her go by each morning, but she never looked up again at my window. Yet I had a feeling that she knew that someone was watching her, and watching her with unusual interest.

I was piqued. The mood was quite

ridiculous, and yet I had come to feel that I had some sort of personal right to consider myself her friend. I did not even know her name, where she lived, or what part she played in life. She was just the woman who walked down the lane, a woman whose eyes were sad. The ego in me claimed her, just as it claimed the landscape and the sky.

I grew most abominably restless.

"Look here, doctor, I've had four weeks in bed. I'm going to rebel."

He was a large man, florid, sleepy, sympathetic.

"For your own good, you know. I think I might rig you up in plaster-of-Paris, and let you get about with a stick."

"Well, do it."

He humoured me, and in two days I managed to stump downstairs and get out into the garden.

I wanted to ask questions about the woman who came down the lane, and yet I was afraid of making a blatant betrayal of my interest. The thing had to be done delicately; one had to appear casual and dispassionate.

Farmer Jackson came and smoked a pipe with me in the garden on the first day of my descent.

"You never expected to have a stranger here for eight weeks. That motor smash of mine has made me quite a part of the place."

He turned his sleepy smile on me.

"You haven't seen much of it—yet."

"You'd be surprised, farmer, how much one can see from a window. I've learnt to know your horses in the wagon-team, and the ducks that go out in procession across the meadow. Then there's the postman, and the baker, and the old chap who clipped the hedges. One gets quite inquisitive. Who's the man who drives the little green car?"

"Challoner—Mr. Molyneux's agent."

"And who's the young woman who comes down the lane each morning?"

"You mean the lady in the pink dress?"

"I believe she does wear pink—or is it white?"

"Pink."

"Who is she?"

Jackson did not appear to be interested in her.

"An artist lady, I'm told. Took the cottage up on the edge of the heath for the summer. I believe her name's Hamilton."

THE MILL POOL

"Oh," I said with the air of a man who is bored, "someone in love with the simple life. How is it you don't get the paper till twelve o'clock? It makes me feel that the news is stale."

I had got rid of my nurse, and I felt like a free man. It was possible to get up at half-past six, hobble downstairs, and out into the lane. I helped myself along with a couple of sticks, and adventured in the direction of the village.

I had so timed it that she would overtake me if she came down the lane that morning. I was behaving like a creature of deceit; but since the initiative should lie with the man, he cannot be blamed for inventing ruses.

But I was a poor creature with that stiff leg of mine; five weeks in bed had left me confoundedly weak; at the end of two hundred yards or so I had had my fill of walking.

And then I dropped one of my sticks. I knew she was behind me, for I had glanced back along the lane and seen her coming past Windhover Farm.

I made a very half-hearted attempt to fish for the lost stick with the crook of the other, shuffling round so that I faced her as she approached. I had no intention of recapturing that stick.

"It's very ridiculous, but I can't stoop. I wonder——?"

I raised my hat. She was looking at me with eyes that seemed to question my sincerity.

"I have got this leg of mine in plaster."

She said nothing, but picked up the stick and handed it to me.

"Thank you so much. I am learning to walk."

She seemed to feel herself compelled to say something.

"You had an accident."

"Yes; drove my car into the ditch in trying to avoid a perambulator."

"Yes; I heard."

She struck me as being in an insane hurry to walk on. Her eyes had a sensitive, frightened look, as though she shrank from possible questions. I had the sense not to detain her.

"I'm afraid I shall have to turn back. I am a miserable weakling at present."

A faint smile of relief showed itself on her face. It did not flatter me, and yet it quickened my interest in her most amazingly. Why did she shrink from

people? Why did she look as though her pride was a wild thing, too shy to be approached?

I raised my hat, and she walked on.

Each morning I contrived to be in the garden when she passed Windhover Farm. I noticed that she kept to the far side of the road.

But I was in no mood to be rebuffed. She had begun to fill the whole conscious day for me. The thought of her was a mysterious perfume, like the scent of a garden when dusk is falling.

I determined to make her speak to me each morning. I wanted the thing to begin gradually. All that was sensitive in me respected all that was sensitive in her.

The obvious "good mornings" had to serve at first. I wished that I had the right to be as humanly frank and cheery as the old hedger up the lane. But what might have come from his mouth could not come from mine.

So things progressed for a week, till I walked out boldly into the road one morning.

"Are you going down to the village?"

"Yes."

"So am I. May I walk down with you?"

She looked confused, but she did not say me nay.

We took twenty minutes to reach the village. Her air of aloofness seemed to become more marked, and though I talked hard I had a feeling that nothing that I said to her mattered. She was most tantalising and elusive, and all the while I was conscious of a shadowy sadness behind those eyes of hers.

She was bound for the village post office. So was I. I noticed that she hesitated outside the doorway, and when she entered her face grew suddenly cynical and hard.

"Any letters for me?"

"No, miss."

She drew back, and the postmistress looked at me over her spectacles.

"Have you any letters? I'm Mr. Wellsford, from Windhover Farm."

There was a fair pile for me. They had to be sorted out, and when I turned to go I found that Miss Hamilton had left the shop.

The postmistress was a gossip.

"That young lady comes in every morning, and I've not handed her three letters in a month."

"Oh," I said snubbingly, and walked out, leaving her staring at me across the counter.

I had always been a rebel, a scorner of the crowd conventions, and I more than fancied that I had detected the rebel spirit in this girl's eyes. I did not see her for several mornings. She appeared to have abandoned her walks to the village shop and post office, and I wondered why?

I strolled there myself, and the unabashed postmistress pointed to a parcel lying on the counter.

"It's come."

"What? Something for me?"

I turned it round and read the address: "Miss Judith Hamilton, Heath Cottage, Kings Basset." The label on which the address was written bore the name of a well-known publisher.

"No—for her. It's come back four times these two months."

"What has?"

"That there parcel."

I was angry, angry with the vulgar, prying shrewdness of the woman and her daring to discuss Judith Hamilton's affairs over the counter of her post office and shop.

I picked up the parcel.

"I'll take it—for Miss Hamilton."

"But, sir—"

I banged the door and left her to argue it out alone.

Heath Cottage lay up on the edge of the moor a quarter of a mile above Windhover Farm. I found it to be a little stone building thatched with heather, just a labourer's cottage with its plot of garden ground and bit of orchard. A clump of Scotch firs sheltered it from the north wind, and westwards stretched the wild, purple uplands of the moor.

A rough hedge of furze, thorn, and oak shut in the garden. Someone had painted the name on a bit of board and fastened it to the gate. I had my hand on the latch when I saw her sitting in a deck chair under an apple tree, a drawing-board on her knees.

I rattled the latch, and she glanced up and saw me.

"I beg your pardon. I was coming this way, and I found something waiting for you at the post office."

She put the drawing-board aside and rose. I saw that her eyes were fixed on the parcel I was carrying. It was as though I were a mere impersonal human

creature, and that the thing in my hands was all that mattered.

"Oh, thanks—you need not have bothered."

She came across the grass and down the little path between two diminutive flower borders. Her face looked very white and strained.

I noticed that her hand trembled as she took the parcel.

"Thank you. Yes, I was expecting this—we are old friends."

Then she began to laugh, and her laughter shocked me. It was soft, desperate, half-hysterical. She flushed. I saw her free hand clench itself. She was trying to smother that laughter, to regain her self-control.

"Thanks—so much."

I stepped back.

"My leg is still a tyrant. You'll excuse me—if I make for home."

Her eyes thanked me, expressed genuine relief. She wanted to be left alone.

I walked back to the farm feeling that I had touched the edge of a tragedy. A common person would have laughed over it, just as the common person's idea of pathos never rises above snivellings about children and old people with white hair. The smothering of a book may be far more tragic than the smothering of a wholly superfluous child. Yet I had a suspicion that the atmosphere in which Judith Hamilton lived was charged with something more subtle than the passion to create. A rebuff would not have meant so much to her; defeat would not have tried her courage so sorely.

I don't know what impulse made me wander out that evening along the grass track that led to the deserted mill. I was the victim of a vague restlessness, a poignant dissatisfaction. I wanted to think how I could best overcome Judith Hamilton's obstinate reserve.

The deserted mill was an old stone building straddling the stream that flowed through the Kings Basset valley. Steam had sounded its doom; a bankruptcy had completed it; no one had even bothered to pull it down for the value of its stone. The water roared through its black sluices, but the great iron wheel rusted motionless in its narrow cell. The building itself was a smother of ivy; jackdaws nested in its upper rooms; valerian and wild snapdragon tufted the walls.

THE MILL POOL

The river was a silver thread drawn across the green of the valley, with willows lining the banks, and flags and sedges growing in the shallows. An indefinable melancholy pervaded the landscape, for clouds had covered the sun, and a sudden chill had fallen.

The path to the mill led through a tangle of brambles and young thorn trees, and came out on a steep bank overhanging the upper pool. A wooden bridge, carried on brick piers, still ran along

the back of the mill-house, and overhung the sluices. Someone was standing on the bridge, looking over the wooden rail at the water.

I paused at the top of the bank, where an elder tree threw a big patch of shadows. I saw that Judith Hamilton had not heard me; she imagined herself alone, unwatched and undisturbed. I stood as still as a hunter who has surprised some wild thing drinking at a forest pool.

The water was sliding into the sluices



She imagined herself alone, unwatched and undisturbed

not more than a dozen inches below Judith's feet. I saw her kneel down and dabble her hands in it, as though to feel whether it was very cold. Then she stood up again and seemed to hesitate, and in a flash I guessed all that was in her mind.

I shouted some commonplace remark, and scrambled down the bank.

"You seem fond of solitude."

I shall never forget the way she turned on me. It was as though I had surprised the nakedness of her soul, spied upon her to discover her secret. Her anger was like a pale and sensitive flame.

"How dare you follow me like this!"

"I'm sorry. I had not followed you. I did not know you were here."

Her eyes searched mine.

"Why should I believe you?"

"Why should I tell you a lie?"

"Because you are a man, and all men lie to women."

She flushed up, and turning away, rested her hands on the bridge-rail. Her whole body was quivering; I could see her hands straining tensely at the rail.

We were utter strangers to each other, and yet I felt that I knew her as I knew no other soul on earth. I felt that I could speak to her with an almost primitive frankness, that I had a right to speak to her thus. Her anguish gave me a kind of chivalrous hardihood that refused to be rebuffed.

"All men are not like that. And if chance has betrayed you to me, am I to be blamed?"

Her eyes flashed to mine.

"Betrayed? What d'you mean?"

"Only that I could not help reading your thoughts—how you were being tempted."

She winced as though I had struck her.

"You are very insolent."

"If to be human is to be insolent, then I cannot help it. Why not talk to me? I know what it is to feel sick unto death."

She was staring at the water. I saw her smile a pathetic, cynical smile.

"You are very persistent."

"Have I worried you—thrust myself on you these last few weeks?"

"In a way."

"Then you felt it?"

"Perhaps."

I went nearer.

"Do you know that I used to listen to your voice when you used to speak to that old man in the lane each morning? Then

I wanted to see you. I had my bed moved so that I could watch the lane. No, I am not making love; I am only telling you things. Then I used to wait in the garden to see you pass. You remember my dropping my stick? I did it on purpose; I wanted to speak to you."

She smiled very faintly, the ghost of a smile.

"Oh, you sentimentalist!"

"Call it what you like."

"But I might be married!"

"Would that change you?"

"Assuredly."

"Well, I half imagined you to be married."

She smiled again, very cynically.

"You are quite clever at driving me into answering your questions. I'm not married."

She had recovered her self-mastery, and she was ready to fence with me, to hold me off with the cold steel of her cynicism.

"So you are a kind of sentimental Don Quixote going about sympathising with interesting-looking women?"

"No. I detest women in the mass."

"Of course. And you thought I was going to drown myself in this mill pool?"

"I did not think; I felt it. And it is the truth."

She tried to meet my eyes, and failed.

"What then?"

"I don't mean such a thing to happen."

"Indeed! And who gave you any authority to interfere with my right to do as I please with myself?"

This word-fencing angered me. She was so elusive, so proudly self-contained, so sensitive a rebel. My compassion, and my very desire to possess her, drove me to a more passionate attack.

"I am stronger than you are. Is a man going to stand aside and let a woman——?"

"Be careful! I have a temper."

"Let it flare. I'll match it."

"You have a sense of the dramatic—a touch of Shaw, I suppose."

Before she could move I had caught her left wrist in my right hand.

"The devil take all stage nonsense, and such stuff! Do you think I am going to let you throw yourself into that cursed pool?"

She tried to twist free.

"You're hurting me."

"I'm not to blame."

"Beast!"

THE MILL POOL

"I accept the word. But you must fight this out with me. If I have got to wrestle with death for you, do you think I am going to stand on ceremony?"

For some seconds we stood quite still, looking into each other's eyes. Then something seemed to break in her; her upper lip was quivering; she faltered and would not look at me.

"Haven't you any shame?"

"Why should I be ashamed?"

"You are playing the bully."

"For your sake."

She hung her head.

"Let my hand go," she said very quietly.

I humoured her, for I could see that she was near to tears, and my heart yearned for her.

"Thank you."

She was biting her lip and clenching her hands. I stood aside and made way for her to pass; nor did I look at her for a moment.

She walked past me, and I let her go first up the path, for I felt that she was at war with her own soul and wanted to hide her face from the world. We did not speak to each other as we walked in single file up the old grass road. I had made up my mind that it was she who should break the silence.

We were in sight of the gate opening into the lane when she half turned her head and spoke to me.

"I suppose you feel rather triumphant."

"God forbid!" I answered her.

She went on for another twenty yards without speaking.

"It's strange, but I don't even know your name."

"Christopher Wellsford."

"What do you do—in this world?"

"I'm a barrister who pretends to farm."

"Then life has been easy."

"There was a time," I said, "when I lived on thirty shillings a week."

She paused at the gate, but she showed me only her profile.

"I wonder if you really understand," she said.

"What?"

"The woman's view."

"Let me try," I answered her.

She sighed.

"No, not to-night. I want to think. Perhaps I may talk to you to-morrow."

We said "Good-bye" at the gate, and I let her go up the lane alone, for I felt that

she was safe from her own despair, and in a mood that yearned for solitude.

I walked up to Heath Cottage early next morning. There was smoke coming from the little squat chimney. I was satisfied, and turned back down the lane.

I went up again about noon. She was sitting out in the little orchard; I could see her over the hedge.

I paused a moment.

"May I come and see you this afternoon?"

She nodded.

"Yes—I suppose you must."

When I turned in at the gate that afternoon I found that she had carried a table out into the orchard and set out her tea-things. She was somewhere in the cottage; I saw her move across the window.

She heard the click of the gate-latch.

"Is it you?"

"Yes."

"Go and sit under the trees. I'm making tea."

"Can I help?"

"No; this is my affair."

I went and sat in an old Windsor chair where the sunlight came flickering through the apple boughs upon the grass. The place was very solitary, very peaceful, with the blue horizon visible here and there between the trees.

She appeared with the teapot and a plate of bread-and-butter.

"I'm sorry—I've no cake."

Her eyes met mine with a determined frankness.

"Is cake utterly essential?"

"Oh, perhaps! People demand it—at the end of their bread-and-butter days, when they were really happier on the bread-and-butter."

"Always?"

"There are exceptions."

She sat down at the table and poured out tea, and we began to talk about a hundred and one things, but never about the thing that mattered. Yet we were circling round it, drawing nearer and nearer, knowing that a confession was inevitable.

"Won't you smoke?"

"May I?"

"Of course."

I pulled out my pipe and tobacco pouch. "Quite a pleasant spot this. How did you get it?"

"I just came down into the wilds, found this place empty, and rented it for six

months. I wanted to be quite alone, and I wanted to work."

"You've had no servant."

"No; I could not afford one; I preferred to do the work myself."

She was sitting with her hands clasped over one knee, her chin raised, her eyes at gaze, measuring life and fate.

"Perhaps you have never known what it is to be a slave."

"No; in a sense, I have always been free."

"I was trying to escape from slavery. Ten hours a day at thirty shillings a week! Yes, I worked those hours in an office. You see, my father was one of those happy-go-lucky people who bring their daughters up generously and die without leaving a penny. Well, I earned my own living in London and I hated it more each year."

A little frown of pain showed on her forehead.

"Imagine the prospect! It's like being shut up in a cage, doing the same dull, futile things each day, knowing that there is no chance of escape. I loathed it. I'm not a born slave, but a rebel. Of course, there are desperate ways of escaping. Men—of a sort—try to take advantage of our discontent; but I saw through it—and hated them for their selfishness."

I said nothing, but smoked my pipe.

She went on:

"I had learnt to paint—just futile, pretty things, useless stuff in the world market. I took to writing—at nights and on Sundays; I even had two or three short stories accepted. Then I saved a little money—penny by penny almost. I meant to gamble—to chance everything on one desperate venture for liberty. I threw up my berth; I came down here; I meant to call my soul my own for six months in the country. I wrote. In three months I had written a novel. Then I launched it upon the waters. It drifted back time after time. It is not a bad novel—perhaps there is too much truth in it, and it does not end prettily. Well, it came back the last time. All my

money was gone. I was faced with a final choice."

She glanced at me, and I nodded.

"Hadh't you any friends?"

"No one who could help me to liberty."

"I see. So—then?"

"I had to choose. Should I go back to slavery, or——?"

I was silent; for the moment I could find nothing to say to her. Even the love that was in my heart shrank from appearing to seize a selfish opportunity.

"You are making it very difficult for me," I said at last; "but won't you give me a chance of proving that there may be an alternative?"

She smiled a little incredulously.

"But it seems quite absurd that you should care."

"And yet—if I should speak to you as I wish to speak—you might think me like one of those men——"

She flushed slightly and her voice softened.

"No. I think you are different. And somehow I want to like you, though I'm desperately afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of myself—of the temptation to let someone carry my burden—of the danger of unhappiness coming, and of your thinking my need had made me——"

She did not try to finish the sentence; nor was I in a mood to let her finish it.

"Good God!" I said. "You want saving from yourself. Look at the sunlight on those woods. Look at me—just a big boy of a man who wants to love you. I'll pull the tangle of life straight for you, and you shall keep me from getting sententious."

I stood up and held out my hands.

"Come, young woman, let's go out and trample the heather. Give up fighting problems—let's live."

She looked in my eyes, long and steadily. Then a smile, tremulous, tender, strangely appealing, seemed to transfigure her face.

"I believe I can trust you," she said.

She gave me her hands.



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Casals August 1919



THE BRIDGE OF PAIN

By WARWICK DEEPING



PAMELA WESTERN lay on the couch by the open French window. There were flowers beside her, but she had not looked at them; a book lay on the table, but she had not opened it. A white languor possessed her. Her chestnut-coloured hair made the pallor of her perfect skin and the shadows about her dark eyes more marked.

The doctor had just left her, and his shadow had gone across the terrace of that southern villa, to be joined by another shadow where the vine-walk sloped down towards the gate.

"How do you think she is to-day?"

It was a gentle-eyed woman with flaxen hair who asked him the question. She walked up daily from her own villa lower down the hill to sit with Pamela Western and try to lift her out of her loneliness.

The doctor did not appear to be an optimist.

"No better. Unless something rouses her, she will just sink and sink."

"You mean she will die?"

"No, not necessarily. She will become one of those hopeless mental cases, melancholic without being mad. She has lost the will to live. That's what is the matter."

"What could rouse her?"

The doctor, Englishman that he was, gave a little shrug of the shoulders that he had caught from the people of the South.

"Some shock, an emotional shock perhaps, but where it is to come from, Heaven knows."

He was frank, and the gentle-eyed woman liked him the better for it.

"If that cad of a husband of hers could see her now! If only there had been children!"

"Some human necessity. Yes."

The doctor was busy and had no time to discuss psychology. He disappeared down the vine-covered walk, and the fair-haired woman crossed the terrace and looked in at the window of Pamela Western's room.

"Well, dear, how are you?"

Pamela's eyes were wide open, but they did not seem to see things.

"Much the same, Grace, thank you."

She spoke slowly and apathetically.

"Wouldn't you like a stroll in the garden. You haven't been out in the garden for three days, and the anemones and primulas are lovely."

Pamela shook her head.

"I think you ought to try, dear."

"Why should I try?"

"Because you must make up your mind to get well."

"I don't want to get well, Grace. What is there to get well for?"

"Oh, come now, dear, you make me feel miserable. I want you to get well; all your friends want you to get well. You are of importance to us, dear, if not to yourself."

"If I felt it mattered, I would try. But I can't feel that it matters."

Her friend looked at her compassionately.

"Shall I read to you?"

"You'll think me horrid, Grace, but I don't think I should listen. I can't fix my attention on things. It's just a kind of torpor. I like to lie and listen to the wind in the olives; it's soothing, just like some merciful forgetfulness washing over me like a sea."

"Did you sleep last night?"

"I hardly know. You have been so very patient with me, Grace. I know the children want you."

"Shall I bring the children up to see you?"

Pamela winced.

"I don't think I could bear it, Grace. It might have been so different—if I—had had children."

"Oh, you poor dear."

Grace Fullerton bent over and kissed her, and then slipped away with tears in her eyes.

For five successive years Pamela Western had come to this villa by the Southern sea, and they had been happy years till that mad infatuation of Geoffrey's had wrecked everything. The Villa

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des Citrons belonged to Pamela, for Geoffrey had given it her in those earlier days that were a memory. They had made the garden together, planted the roses and the cypress walks, and turned the hillside into a place of delight. Far below lay the sea, blue between the wooded slopes of two steep hills. Terraces planted with vines, olives, oranges, and lemons fell away from the main platform where the house stood. The garden was full of cypress groves, winding paths, sunny, rock-girt spaces where the lizards basked. A stream ran through it, splashing down a precipitous ravine that was crossed by a wooden footbridge. The path that was linked up by the bridge over the ravine led from the house to the main road.

But the Villa des Citrons seemed to hold nothing but memories, and the loneliness of the woman who once had been happy here. She had come from England to winter here in the South, come like a sick bird of passage that follows a kind of instinct, even though it flies southward but to die. And this southern home, this place where love had schemed and played, had hurt her till the heart had grown numb within her, and she had come to feel neither loneliness nor pain.

Grace Fullerton had gone down the white curves of the dusty road with pity and condemnation in her heart.

"It is tragic that she should have gared so much," she thought. "If that man could only be made to suffer as she has suffered."

A low wall closed the road on one side, the rocky face of the hillside on the other. Grace Fullerton's eyes were not on the alert, or she might have seen a man draw back behind a rock some fifty yards down the road. He swung himself up by the trunk and branches of a stunted pine, and went scrambling up among the wild rosemary and broom and heather, and by the time that Grace Fullerton passed the place, he was out of sight, hidden by the tangle of growth upon the hillside.

He was a slightly built man with a thin face and restless eyes. There was something feverish in the way he moved, and his one desire seemed to be to escape being seen. He went climbing up the hillside till he came to a rocky spur covered with dwarf pines, and here he

paused like a scout who has reached a vantage point from which he can watch an enemy's movements.

This spur overlooked the Villa des Citrons, for just below lay the rough stone wall that bounded the grounds. Beyond the ravine crossed by the footbridge rose the terraces with the path winding up through olives and oranges, and lemons, and vines. The white house itself and the terrace in front of it were not more than two hundred yards away.

The man in the pine wood, by keeping just beyond the brow of the hill, could see much that went on at the villa without himself being seen. He was so near that he could see Pamela Western lying on her couch by the open window.

The restless-eyed man had hidden himself daily in the pine wood for the last three weeks. No one came into the wood, for no one had any work to do there. And so the watcher had lain there undisturbed through the greater part of each day. He had seen François in his blue trousers and white shirt at work in the garden, and Manette in her coloured shawl come out to pick flowers for the house. He had seen the pale woman with the chestnut hair wander out on to the terrace, and walk languidly up and down. But for days Pamela Western had not stirred from that couch by the open window, and the watcher's eyes had grown more hungry and more restless.

He had the look of a man cast out of Paradise, gazing at it, forbidden to return. There was more than regret in his eyes. He had come to realise that the woman over yonder was very ill, that life might be slipping away from her. And a kind of burning anguish, like to physical thirst, would torment him while he lay there under the trees. He wanted to rush down the hillside, scramble over the wall, cross the footbridge, and climb the path to the white house. But, no, if he went at all, that meeting might be too bitter for both of them. He had played the fool too scandalously for any woman to forgive him.

On that particular day he saw François come down to the footbridge across the ravine. The man seemed to be examining the bridge. He shook the rails, climbed down the steep banks and peered underneath it.

The Bridge of Pain

"François was always a careful fellow," thought the man up above, "I suppose he wants to make sure that the bridge is not getting shaky."

He saw François disappear up the path and come out on the main terrace. The man went towards Pamela's window, and stood there, hat in hand.

"The bridge is not safe, madame."

"I shall not go that way any more, François."

"No, madame."

"Let the gate in the wall be locked. I will tell my friends."

"Yes, madame. After all, no one comes by the path when the road is easier. It was when Monsieur——"

He remembered himself, and hurriedly covered up the lapse.

"I will tell Jean to come and have a look at it; he is a good carpenter, is Jean."

The man in the pine wood had brought his lunch with him, a packet of sandwiches and a flask of wine. The weather was still and oppressive, and away over the northern hills clouds had banked themselves, purple black clouds that hung there like a great canopy. Birds twittered in the olive groves, and a bell was ringing in the church tower down by the sea.

The man in the pine wood lay and stared at the white house. He could see the open French window, and the figure lying there upon the couch.

"She has not been out for days," he thought to himself; "she seems to have no strength; she lies there as though she were dead."

A great fear smote him. Perhaps she was dying. Perhaps some incurable disease had stricken her, and she had come to the Villa des Citrons to die!

He felt cold, even in the sun. For he could not shake off the conviction that he had been the cause of it all, that he had broken her life and broken her health. His mouth felt dry, and he moistened his lips with the wine in his flask. It was horrible to lie there and think of all that he had lost.

A passionate curiosity grew in him. He wanted to be near her, even for a few seconds, to walk the familiar terrace paths, to go softly to her window and feel that she—the one woman he really loved—was there in the flesh.

What an accursed fool he had been! He might draw near to her secretly, but the discovery of his own folly had rendered him shamefully sensitive; he could not thrust himself back into the life that he had marred.

Yet the yearning was great in him, a kind of hunger to be near her, without her knowing. He need go in neither by the main entrance nor by the gate in the wall. He could scramble up from the road, and go down through the olives to the upper terraces where François grew his vegetables. It would be quite safe after dusk. No one would be about.

The idea thrilled him. He felt like a boy before an adventure, but the heart in him was the heart of a man who had broken his life only to realise what a precious thing that life had been.

Dusk fell, the swift southern dusk, and with it came those massed clouds out of the north. A great stillness covered the hills, a stillness that suggested suspense.

Pamela was still lying at the open window, motionless and apathetic. She liked the dusk, with its mystery and its sadness; it seemed in sympathy with her own melancholy languor; it offered nothing, and it ended in night.

Nanette came bustling in.

"Madame, there is to be a storm. François says so. He has been spreading his mats over the carnations."

"I have heard no thunder, Nanette."

"But—it is there—ready, and it will come suddenly. I will close the window for madame. And the air, you will not heed the cold air at sunset?"

"No, Nanette, you can leave the window open. I should like to watch the storm."

"You will have the lamp?"

"Not yet. Come again presently, Nanette."

It grew black as pitch without, but still the hush of the night was absolute. Then a sudden gust of wind came down the valley, and made the olives shiver and the pines moan. Pamela sat up on the couch, her hands clasped about her knees, an Italian scarf over her shoulders. The coming of the storm seemed to stir her, to speak to her as none of Nature's gentler moods could speak.

The wind died down and all was still

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again, but that sudden rush of sound had hidden a more human sound from Pamela's ears. A man had come down through the rose-walk on to the terrace, and moved swiftly along it in the shadow of the house. He was standing with his back flat against the wall not three feet from the open window.

A vague gleam of blue light played along the hills. Then the wind came again with a wilder cry, and the olives shrieked, and the leaves of the palm trees on the terrace clashed together.

The man leaning against the wall was struggling with an impulse that seemed to come to him with the crying of the wind. It bade him stand at that open window but for a moment. It was so dark that she would not see him, while he would feel that he had been near to her once more.

Pamela was resting her chin upon her knees. The pupils of her eyes were dilated like the eyes of a priestess who sees visions in the dark. The darkness was not so utter to her as it would have been to normal eyes.

Suddenly her hands tightened about her knees. A vague figure had moved into the opening of the window.

"Is that you, François?"

No one answered.

"Who is it?"

Almost as she spoke lightning broke from the clouds above. It was huge and sudden, filling the valley with one blue glare. For one moment the terrace and the room itself were as light as day.

Pamela saw the face of the man who stood there.

"Geoffrey!"

She heard footsteps crossing the terrace, and she started up and stood at the window.

"Geoffrey, come back, the storm!"

A second flash showed her his figure poised at the top of the flight of steps that led to the winding path by the ravine. She understood instinctively why he had fled when the lightning had betrayed him to her.

Suddenly she remembered the foot-bridge.

"Geoffrey, the bridge is unsafe——"

A thunder crash smothered her cry, and in the fullness of her fear she ran out on to the terrace, she, who had not

walked a hundred yards in the last seven days.

"Geoffrey, are you there? The bridge is not safe!"

A lull had fallen but no one had answered her cry, and she fancied that she could hear footsteps dying away down the path. He was going towards the bridge. It might break under him and drop him twenty feet into the ravine.

Fear inspired her, a fear that was greater than any dread of the storm. She put a scarf over her head, ran to the steps, descended them, and groped her way along the path. The blue glare came again, and the thunder that followed seemed right overhead. Rain had not begun to fall as yet, that torrential, smothering rain that lasts but a few minutes and then passes with the storm.

Pamela hurried on. Now and again she stopped and called to her husband, but no answering cry came to her. A gusty wind blew down the valley and made a confusion among the lemon groves and the myrtles. She knew every turn of the path, and soon she could hear the splash of water in the ravine where it fell in a miniature cascade over the rock.

The path straightened out, and she knew that the bridge lay before her. Had Geoffrey crossed it, or——?

Another lightning flash lit the whole valley, and that momentary glare showed her that the bridge was gone. Two posts and the ends of the broken hand-rails were all that was left of it on the near side of the ravine.

Pamela stood like one stunned. Darkness had blotted out everything, but her imagination showed her the tangle of broken wood below, and a man lying in the water itself or among the ferns and dwarf shrubs that covered the rocky bottom.

She put her hands to her mouth and shouted.

"Geoffrey, Geoffrey!"

She called in vain.

A fierce desire to go to him seized her. He was hurt, perhaps killed, this man who had been hers in the happier days, and who was hers still in the depths of her heart. There was a rough rock path leading down into the ravine, difficult enough by day, but hazardous in the darkness. But Pamela Western was

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not a twentieth century woman, but a human impulse. It did not occur to her to call François, to think of such a thing as a lantern. She groped her way to where she knew the path began, and began to descend it, clinging like a cat.

Where caution might have failed, desperate instinct succeeded. She reached the bottom of the ravine and began to clamber over the stones in the direction of the bridge. The water splashed in the darkness just below her, but the place was a black pit save when the lightning lit every bush and rock crevice and crag. She half-crawled, groping with her hands. They touched something soft, and she knew what she had found.

A flash showed him to her, lying on his back on a mass of heather, his face to the sky, his arms spread. Whether it was life or death the lightning did not tell her, and as she fell on her knees beside him, the thunder rain came down.

All Pamela Western's nerves and strength seemed to come back to her at this crisis. He was alive; a touch of her fingers on his wrists told her that, and the realisation of it inspired her.

She stood up and groped her way back to the path, the lightning glare, playing through the sheeted rain, helping her. She was conscious of an innocent exultation like the gloating of a mother over the return of a broken and reckless son. He was hers; he belonged to her again; fate had surrendered him into her hands.

She reached the house somehow, drenched, her white dress stained with soil and moss. And to save time she went round to the kitchen door and found Nanette preparing dinner.

"Ah, madame!"

"Nanette, a lantern. Monsieur Geoffrey came to see me; he went away by the bridge, and it broke under him. Where is François?"

Fat Nanette stared at her mistress as though she thought her mad.

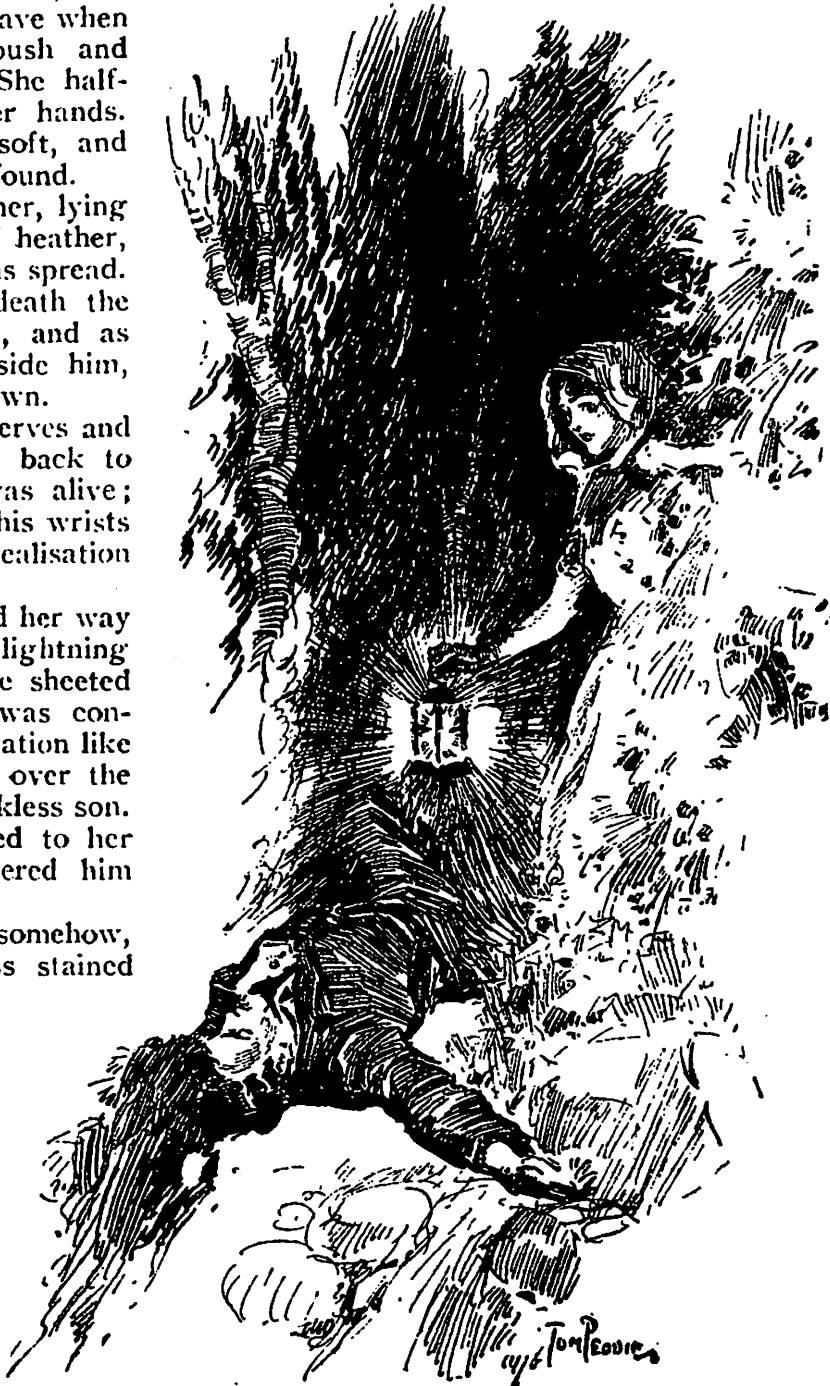
"Ah, madame, where have you been?"

"Nanette, find François. Tell him to go to the doctor. Monsieur Geoffrey is lying hurt in the ravine. And give me a lantern."

"But, madame! You have been dreaming, perhaps?"

A lantern hung from a hook in the ceiling. Pamela climbed on a chair and reached it down.

"You think I am mad, Nanette. Go



"She found her husband lying on a grassy space under a rock. He had dragged himself a little way, and then fainted with pain."

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and find François at once, and tell him to go for the doctor. They will find me with Monsieur Geoffrey in the ravine."

She struck a match and lit the candle in the lantern.

"I will come with you, madame."

Pamela turned on her with sudden impatience.

"Nanette, you are a fool. Go and find François. Where is he?"

"Chopping wood, madame, up there in the shed."

"Well, you know where to find him. Or shall I have to go myself?"

Nanette came near and looked into her mistress's eyes.

"Madame is not mad then, or dreaming! No, no, I see! Mon Dieu! I will go."

She threw a shawl over her head and rushed out into the lessening darkness. The rain had ceased; the thunder clouds were drifting away; stars showed in the clearing sky.

Pamela made her way back across the terrace and down the path to the place where the bridge had fallen. She heard a sound from below, something between a moan and cry for help.

"I am here, Geoffrey, I am here!"

The sweet smell of the wet earth met the thrill of tenderness in her throat as she climbed down into the ravine, grasping at shrubs and tufts of grass with one hand, while the other held the lantern. She was conscious of no physical weakness; her body was like an instrument of music that had been laid aside, and now answered once more to the touch of life.

She found her husband lying on a grassy space under a rock. He had dragged himself a little way, and then fainted with pain. His right leg was broken, and when he had tried to crawl towards the path, his foot had caught on stones and in tufts of grass, and the pain had mercifully decreed that he should crawl no farther.

Pamela set the lantern on a flat stone. She sat down on the wet grass, and making a lap, lifted Geoffrey's head into it. And somehow, she was quite content.

The light fell upon his face. It was thin and shadowy, the face of an ascetic; also the face of one who had suffered. His forehead was wet with the

sweat of pain. She could see where his teeth had bitten into his lower lip; a streak of blood showed there. And one temple was all stained and caked with soil.

She took her wet scarf and gently wiped away the earth. He moved his head in her lap, whimpered, and opened dazed eyes.

"Don't tell her; don't let her know! Is that you, François?"

She bent over him.

"No, Geoffrey, not François."

Something like fear came into his eyes. He tried to lift his head, but she laid her hands across his forehead.

"Good God, you?"

"Lie still, Geoffrey; are you afraid?"

His eyes stared up at her.

"Yes, I am afraid," he said.

A smile quivered upon her lips.

"Why?"

He closed his eyes, and his white face was lined with pain.

"I was afraid; that was why I came in the dark. I am afraid—because—I have been—what I have been. Pamela, your hand hurts me."

She drew her breath in deeply, but she did not remove her hands from his forehead.

"Geoffrey—no, not that."

"They burn me——"

"They are soft hands, Geoffrey, and wet with the rain."

He opened his eyes and looked up at her steadfastly.

"I had to come back, to be near you. I couldn't help it; I had to come. But I knew I could not come back to you; I had treated you too badly, hurt you too much for that. I was a mad fool, and I have paid for my madness."

She bent over him, smoothing his forehead with her hands.

"Do my hands still hurt you, Geoffrey?"

"Oh, my dear!"

He writhed with a kind of anguish of shame.

"The doctor is coming, Geoffrey. We will carry you up to the house. I had a new carpet in our room, dear. And do you remember the picture I painted of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli; I have it hung over our bed. And the anemones are lovely. And you remember those roses we planted——"

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He groaned.

"Don't—don't——"

She closed his eyelids with her fingers.

"Do my hands still hurt you, Geoffrey?"

"They make me desire impossible things," he said.

"What things?"

He lay silent for a moment.

"I will tell you the truth. It did not take me long to realise what a fool I had been. All that was best in me went back to you. I found that I wanted to come back, that I yearned for our life together. I realised that I had not known what real happiness was like. I knew that I could not come back to you, but I wanted to see you, to be near you without your knowing it. For weeks I have been near you, and you did not know it. And yet it made life harder, made me desire impossible things."

She sighed.

"I have been ill, Geoffrey."

"Yes, that, too, made me afraid."

"But I am ill no longer."

He opened his eyes again.

"You ought not to be down here. You must have got wet through."

"I don't know, I don't care. You will be able to lie on the terrace to-morrow in the sun, and I will read and play to you. The cypresses we planted have grown quite two feet. And you remember we tried making wine out of our grapes; it has turned out splendidly."

"Pamela, if it is in your heart to torture me."

She bent over him suddenly.

"Oh, my dear, fate has brought us together again. What there is to forgive I have forgiven. And it has sent you back to me."

He lifted up his hands to her.

"You forgive me—everything?"

"Yes."

"You offer me another chance?"

"Yes."

"Pamela, I may make love to you again?"

She smiled down at him.

"If you like."

"My God! and such love, love that has come out of hell fire—strengthened and purified. I must win you again."

"Yes, win me again, Geoffrey. It will be like five years ago."

The sound of voices came from above,

and lanterns glimmered on the edge of the ravine. They heard François calling.

"Are you there, madame?"

"Yes, François, we are here."

They came scrambling down the path, the doctor, his chauffeur, François, and another man. They had ropes with them and a big canvas sheet fastened to two poles.

The doctor was a man of the world, but even a man of the world may be astonished.

"Mrs. Western! How did you get here?"

She smiled, sitting there in the light of the lantern with her husband's head in her lap.

"I climbed down. You see, the bridge gave way under Geoffrey."

The doctor stared.

"Hallo! Western. I didn't know—What's wrong—feel broken anywhere?"

"My right leg is smashed somewhere."

"Let's have a look."

He was a wise man, and he did not intrude himself into a mystery that concerned two souls alone. His business was with a broken leg, though he mildly suggested that Pamela should go back to the house and change her wet clothes.

"Yes, when he can go," she said.

Splints were improvised, rough strips of wood that François fetched from his tool shed. Pamela held her husband's hands while the broken leg was being set.

"We shall have to get you up to the house, Western, and then I'll give you a thorough overhaul. How far did you fall?"

"About twenty feet."

"You have got off rather well, I think," and the doctor smiled to himself.

They laid him in the sheet fastened to the two poles, and even though there were four men to lend a hand, it proved no light business getting Western up the rough path, but get him up they did, and with no further breakages. Pamela went first with her lantern to show them the way, and so they came up through the orange and lemon groves to the house.

Geoffrey Western found himself lying abed in the familiar room, with the familiar pictures on the walls, and the familiar furniture round him. It was his wife's room; everything spoke of her, and his eyes dwelt on every detail with wondering delight. His leg had been

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set; a hypodermic of morphia had been given him; there were flowers on the table beside him, flowers grown in their garden.

He fell asleep, and slept like a dead Pharaoh. It was eight o'clock in the morning when he woke; one shutter was closed, the other open; the room was full of a mellow, golden light.

He turned his head and found his wife sitting beside him. His hand went out to her instantly as a child's hand goes out to its mother.

"What a waking! Yesterday I never thought of such a thing as this," he murmured.

She drew close, and, leaning her arms on the bed, bent over him.

"Let's pretend, Geoffrey, that you have been asleep for a whole year. All that has been a dream."

"It is very wonderful," he said; "but, dear, to me it can be no dream. I have learnt my lesson. I know now that I cannot live without you."

"And I, also," she said. "It is possible to die of a broken heart."

The doctor called at Grace Fullerton's villa on his way back from the Villa des Citrons. She had heard the news, but the doctor amplified it, showing the magnanimity of the man whose deeper sensibilities had been touched.

"How is Pamela?"

"As well as you are. It was the shock of emotion she needed. Those two people are very happy, and very much in love with each other."

Grace Fullerton could not bring herself to forgive Geoffrey Western so easily.

"Does he deserve it? Will it last?"

The doctor smiled thoughtfully.

"I think so. Western had a talk with me. Do you know, Mrs. Fullerton, a man may make a better husband when he has been allowed to discover that he has been a fool?"

"And must the woman forgive him?"

"That is her triumph," he answered



Had 'em All

A CORRESPONDENT asserts that this is a true story.

At one of the "universal providers," or department stores, a shopper asked a floor-walker where she might find the "Brussels counter."

"Carpets, sprouts, or point lace, ma'am?" was the walker's query.

§ § §

Answer That!

HE: "Madam, you promised to obey me. Do you do it?"

SHE: "Sir, you promised me your worldly goods. Do I get 'em?"

§ § §

Wires Crossed

EAGER YOUNG MAN (who has called up adored one): "I can't wait any longer, dear, I really had to 'phone. Will you marry me?"

Gentle voice (in reply): "Why, yes, of course, I will. But haven't you got the wrong number?"

Appearances are often Deceitful

"My gracious, boy," said the uncle, "you do certainly eat an awful lot for a little boy."

"Well, sir," replied the boy, "maybe I'm not so little as I look from the outside."

§ § §

The Limit

"MRS. GARBUR fell downstairs and bit her tongue in two."

"I feel sorry for her husband. She was a terror when she had only one tongue."

§ § §

His Picture

A YOUNG man was exhibiting some photographs to a charming society girl, with whom he was very much in love.

"This one," he said, handing her a picture, "is my photo with my two French poodles. Can you recognise me?"

"Why, yes, I think so," replied the young woman, looking intently at the picture. "You are the one with the hat on, are you not?"

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Oriana of the Bungalow

By Warwick Deeping

"He was conscious at once of the girl's anguish. There was scorn in it and pride, also a quiet despair that walked blindly in a white sheet."



IN the golden days of September the Romancer pitched his tent in a meadow by the river, having paid his tribute to the owner of the green place where the willows and the great poplars looked at themselves in the stillest of still waters. The Romancer had voyaged Ulysses-like out of the unknown, sculling a brown tub of a dingey, out of which he hauled the aforesaid tent, a camp bed, a sleeping-bag, a mess-basket, a petrol tin full of paraffin, two dispatch-boxes, and some odd books. He made himself tea, sat in the doorway of his tent with the deep contentment of an Oriental, and meditated. The river was a soft flux of green and gold.

"I shall bathe at seven to-morrow," said the Romancer.

And then he became aware of the island.

The island did not matter; it was just a thing of greenness floating on the water, but it held a little white bungalow like a swan sitting on her nest, and the bungalow did matter.

"Oh, well," said the Romancer, "I shall survive that bungalow. Thought I had left them all down at the bottom of that last reach. So long as they don't run a gramophone and play 'Good-bye'; I can stick anything but that."

Later he unearthed one of the dispatch boxes, and using the mess-basket as a table, began to scribble at one of his tales. It was a clever tale, a dawn, dusk, and starlight tale, for the Romancer refused to write tosh. But the tale did not progress that evening. The bungalow kept catching the man's eye like the white dress of a girl loitering in a garden.

"Confound that place!"

He gave it up, and meditated, and his eyes considered the island across the water.

"Queer! It has a lure, a whisper, a beckoning finger. Wonder who lives there?"

Jeremy Shenstone had the eye of an artist and a mystic, and the little white house with its brown beams, and barge-boards, its gay curtains at its casements, its drooping willows and little lawns showed him a strange, autumnal brilliance, a pagan charm.

"Wonder who lives there?" said the Romancer again; "it's rather charming."

But he saw no one, and had concluded that the bungalow was empty, a mere week-end nest, when the dusk fell, and in the thick of the tawny glow of the sunset, the little house lit a solitary star.

"H'm—a candle! Caretaker I suppose."

Jeremy was in the river by seven when the white mist was beginning to lift and the willows were smiling with the sunlight in their tops. He

Oriana of the Bungalow

swam up stream, a strong, brown figure, with a great blue scar slanting across his right shoulder-blade, a memory of the Somme. He came back, swimming as noiselessly as a water-rat, and rounding a green bend of the island, looked straight up into the eyes of romance, the eyes of Oriana Melisande, or the Lady of Shallot. A dark, pale girl with her hair loose on her shoulders, was kneeling on the green cushion of grass and looking at herself in the water.

Shenstone splashed; it was surprise that caused the splash. A pair of startled eyes reproached him, eyes that seemed to have left happiness last somewhere in the days of June. Shenstone felt a fool. A cad is a cad because he never feels foolish.

"Good morning."

It seemed absurd to drift by and say nothing.

"Good morning," said the girl, like echo.

And then those heavy, dark eyes of hers gave a glimmer of intelligence.

"Excuse me—are you camping over there?"

Shenstone trod water.

"Yes. I arrived last night. I'll move—if you think I'm in the way."

"Oh, no," she said, "not that. I was wondering if you had any paraffin."

"Lots," said Shenstone. "If you'll let me I'll bring some over."

"I'll pay you for it. You see, I can't boil any water—unless—"

"I'll bring you a bottle directly I'm dressed."

He had all the frank directness, that instant warming of the heart, that the war had given to all good men and true. Mrs. Grundy had driven a motor-car and nursed wounded men in France, and the lady had learnt to be human and less of a sneak and a prude. Shenstone had the eyes of a good man and a child. The girl knew it at once. He had picked wounded things out of shell-holes. It was in his eyes.

"It's very kind of you," she cried.

"Isn't that the first duty of man?" he laughed. "Sounds rather priggish, though, doesn't it?"

Shenstone swam off, climbed out, and dressed, realizing that Oriana's breakfast would be tealess and cold until that prosaic paraffin crossed the water. He set out in the dingey, carrying a big green bottle full of the precious stuff.

He tied the dingey beside the red canoe and touched sadness, an indefinable melancholy. The island seemed to float in it, as it seemed to float in the softly flowing water. Nor was it the touch of autumn, nor the slightly forlorn look of the garden with its weeds and unclipped edges and confusion of frightened flowers. The sadness was human, the sweet melancholy of the place a coincidence, or merely seasonal, like the fall of the leaf.

The girl met Jeremy on the edge of the veranda.

"Thank you so much. How much is there?"

"Oh—about two pints, I suppose," said the man.

She produced six pennies.

"I think it's threepence a pint."

She was deliberate, queerly mechanical, as though the soul of her were somewhere else.

Shenstone took the pennies. He did not embarrass her by arguing about it.

"Perhaps you want the bottle?"

"I can get another."

"Oh, no, if you'll wait."

He had a glance of the hall sitting-room, a delicate, dainty-looking little place with a bit or two of old oak furniture, a settee covered in rose and white cretonne, and a piano in the far corner.

She came back. He wanted to talk, but her eyes were far away. She was looking in the mirror of her fate, watching for someone, waiting for something to happen.

"Thank you."

"If I can do anything for you in the village—at any time—"

"There is nothing I want," she

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said dully, and Shenstone went back to the dingey.

"I shall stay here," he said to himself; "but why—God knows!"

So the Romancer stayed in the meadow, scribbling a swaggering and sentimental tale for his pet editor, and keeping an interested eye on the island over the water. He cooked his meals, washed up, went shopping in the village, arranged for a boy to act as postman, pottered about in the dingey, and pretended to fish. He wanted to land again on Oriana's island, but found no immediate excuse for it, nor did he see her again the whole of that day.

But towards dusk he heard a few wayward notes struck upon the piano. He was sitting in the doorway of his tent; a heavy dew was falling, and a bat fluttered black against the flush of the sunset. Then Oriana began to sing.

A shadow seemed to steal over Shenstone's face. It was not very often that he had heard such singing or such a breath of sadness in the sweetness of it, and she sang the very songs that made his manhood yearn for stranger things.

"Pale hands I Loved——"

Darkness came, and she was still singing, with no light in the little house, and Shenstone was still listening.

"Tears, idle tears,
I know not what they mean."

But there were tears in her voice, and Shenstone was shivering with loneliness.

The Romancer took the heart of a soldier, and crossed the water in the dingey next morning, the bearer of another bottle of paraffin.

"Thought you might want it," he said with a most unbold air, when she came to the door.

She smiled the very ghost of a smile.

"I have plenty left."

"I wondered—I saw you had no lamp last night."

"It didn't matter," she said.

Jeremy loitered like a shy and brown-faced boy.

"It didn't seem to matter to your singing. I sat in my old tent and listened. It made me think of France when we used to sit and dream and feel desperately lonely."

She looked interested, yet a little frightened.

"I shan't sing again if it makes you feel lonely."

"Don't say that. It was one of those good feelings. You see, I write books and things, and I'm supposed to have a temperament. I'd love to hear you sing again to-night."

"Did you say you write books?" she asked him, leaving the plea unanswered.

"Yes; my name is Shenstone. I don't suppose——"

"I have read some of your books," she said. "I have one of them in there."

Shenstone was thrilled, most absurdly thrilled. The little lamp of his fame had never burnt with a sweeter flame.

"Which one?"

She showed a sudden and sensitive embarrassment.

"'Cophetua.'"

And, somehow, Shenstone understood. Was it a prophecy, that queer, beautiful, and most humanly unconventional tale of his? He wondered.

But she was shrinking back into the house. He made haste to get himself out of the way.

"I must do my day's scribbling," he said, "and if you feel moved to sing to-night——"

"Perhaps."

The Romancer was boiling his kettle for tea when his amateur post-boy arrived with the letters.

"Six for you, sir."

"The more the merrier."

"And here's one for the lady—over there on the island. They said at the village that I might take it over."

"You leave it with mine," said

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Jeremy, inwardly excited. "I'll see to it. I shall be out in the dingey."

When the boy had gone Shenstone sat and stared at the letter, and he kept glancing at it while he was drinking his tea.

"Miss Viola Mewburn."

So that was her name and her destination. It seemed faintly familiar. As for the writing on the envelope it was a man's, round, and thick, and vigorous, and to Shenstone strangely sinister. It was sensual writing, and he thought he had seen it before.

The Romancer lit a pipe, unfastened the dingey, and ferried across to deliver that letter. He found his Oriana in the garden picking sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies.

"My post boy brought a letter for you with mine."

He saw that her eyes were frightened by that letter. She ignored him, tore open the envelope and read it where she stood, so much the creature of suspense that Shenstone could watch her face and feel that she was unconscious of his presence. She read it through twice, and put it back in the envelope with fingers that trembled. She was very white, and her eyes looked blind.

"You will excuse me."

She went into the bungalow, leaving her basket of flowers on the grass, and Shenstone returned to his boat. He felt that he was touching a tragedy, that he was no mere sentimental Englishman wasting a picturesque pity on Bernard Shaw's Norah, a Norah who had not enough to eat. This girl might be hungry, but there was more in the tale than mere hunger.

He was scribbling in his tent when he saw Viola Mewburn come down to the bank and unfasten the red canoe. She had put on a hat, and she had a letter in her hand. Shenstone watched her paddle up stream.

"Posting a reply to that letter. She will have to go to the village.

It will take her the best part of an hour."

A soldier's audacity stirred in him. It might have seemed a caddish thing to do, but Shenstone was very conscious of not being a cad. He got into the dingey and rowed across to the island.

He had but a vague idea of what he might find or what he might see. The girl had left the door open. He went in, glancing round the little room with quick and intelligent eyes. There were photos on the mantelpiece and on the table by the window, and three of these photos were portraits of the same man.

And Shenstone knew him.

He stood holding one of these pictures, and noticing that the writing on it was the same as on the letter.

"So it's you, Blagden, is it? Heavens! what a queer chance."

It was the handsome and rather arrogant face of a man in the early forties. Jeremy knew him so well, one of those charming fellows, so pleasant on the surface, but a prince of cads, and princely in his caddishness. Jeremy had met Marmaduke Blagden's wife less than a year ago, a yellow-haired, chatting cynic, just what the man had made her.

The Romancer put down Blagden's photograph and made his way into the kitchen. A hungry tramp might have acted as Jeremy behaved—opening cupboards and looking into the larder in search of a meal. And all that he found was a tin of bully beef turned out on a plate, a stale loaf of bread, a little pot of jam, a half-empty tin of Swiss milk, and some tea and sugar.

Jeremy looked fierce. He had a quaint trick of ruffling up his mop of brown hair, shoving a hand through it, and in France the gesture had always spelt danger.

He went back into the sitting-room and looked hard at one of Blagden's portraits.

"Damn you!" he said. "There's something very wrong here, and you are just the sort of man to have

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lied to a woman. Suppose you have cut off the supplies. I guess I'm going to see this through."

He walked out into the sunlight and stood staring at the basket of flowers she had left on the grass.

"That letter she is posting is to him. Of course. I wonder if he will come?"

While paddling the dingey across to the other bank he made his resolve.

"I'll wait till he comes."

Three days went by, three perfect, still September days, and Jeremy kept patient watch. No letters came for Oriana, no one touched at the island, nor did she leave it, for the red canoe lay there under Jeremy's eyes from dawn to dusk.

He wanted an excuse, and he found one.

Dusk was darkening the water when he ferried over to the island. There were no lights in the little house. Jeremy knocked at the door.

He heard quick footsteps, the footsteps of one who had been waiting, listening: The door opened, and her eyes met his.

"Oh—it's you!"

She had expected that other man. He was aware of her agitation, and yet he fancied it was not empty of relief. She was strung up for some ordeal.

"I'm awfully sorry to trouble you like this, but do you happen to have a candle?"

"A candle?"

"Yes; I forgot that I had finished my last."

She looked at him blankly.

"I'm sorry, I haven't one; but if you had a lamp?"

"I am out of paraffin too," said the Romancer, "that's to say, there is just enough for the breakfast kettle."

She had to confess that she could not help him, and it hurt. She was abnormally sensitive, on edge, shamed by the lack of such a thing as a candle, and Jeremy felt angry with himself—but a new obstinacy made him thicken his skin!

"You oughtn't to be all alone here without a light," he said.

He fancied that she flinched, and he wondered whether she would shut the door on him, but she didn't.

"Oh, why?"

"It's too lonely. I always had a candle burning in my dug-out. It clears the ghosts away."

"Ghosts," she said; "yes, ghosts."

Jeremy loitered. He was so afraid of hurting her.

"Suppose I shall have to go and meditate. But—tell me, Miss Mewburn, don't you feel lonely here?"

"Sometimes."

"If you are like me, it falls on you like a deluge. I can understand Saul and his evil thoughts, and why music drove them away. Or—talking—the sound of a voice."

She seemed to hesitate. There was something about him that touched her. He was such a boy.

"Would you like me to sing?"

"I'd love it. I'll go and sit in the boat."

"It's cold out there," she said; "why shouldn't you come in? That's to say, if you—"

She stood back and Jeremy crossed her threshold. In all his life he had never felt such a breath of mystery, such strange wonder within him.

"May I sit here?"

He chose the settee.

"Please do. And won't you smoke?"

"No, I won't smoke," he said; "it's a coarse habit at times."

She sat down by the window, her profile showing against the light, and Jeremy was struck by its purity, the meltingness of it. She was one of those who clung to an ideal, suffered for it, trusted it, even though it gave her death.

And suddenly she began to talk to him.

"Why do you choose solitude, if you find it lonely?"

"One has to go into the wilds sometimes, to think. I like either a crowd or the deeps of a wood and the voice of a solitary bird."

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"Of course, you're unusual," she said.

"Don't say that. Authors have always had the reputation of being such selfish, difficult beasts. If you're not human, what's the use?"

She sat considering something. Then Jeremy asked her a question.

"Where did you learn to sing?"

She hesitated a moment, looking at him with a child's eyes.

"Perhaps in your wood. I'm a professional, or rather I was a professional. I had faced my first concerts, and then——"

"And then?"

"I was ill. A friend lent me this little place."

Jeremy's face seemed to darken. He was thinking of Marmaduke Blagden, that sensual opportunist, that glib and polished cad.

"When are you going to sing again?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she answered; "perhaps never."

But she sang to him in the dusk, and Jeremy's heart lost itself in the sadness of her singing. She could not help the sadness; nor could he, but he went back to his tent that night with the soul of him listening to strange music.

Another day passed. Jeremy walked to the village, bought a packet of candles, and took half of them across to the island. Oriana was sitting in the sun reading, and he saw that it was his book that she had in her hands.

"I wonder if you will accept these?"

She smiled.

"You bring me more light. Some of us are torch bearers, as you are in this book."

"Do you mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then I have done something more than play with words. Telling tales seems so futile—at times."

"Life's a tale," she said, "and the children will always listen."

He left her, and towards dusk a queer premonition of evil seized

him. It was as though he felt it approaching, was conscious of the nearness of some unclean presence.

It was growing dusk when he heard the splash of sculls and saw a boat creeping down the side of the island. It stopped by the landing stage beside the red canoe, and a man climbed out, a biggish man with heavy shoulders. He did not notice the tent across the water.

"You cad," said Jeremy, "why didn't you come in the clean and decent daylight?"

The man went up to the bungalow, and suddenly Jeremy heard Oriana's voice. So still was the night that he could hear the words she spoke.

"So you are ashamed to come in the daylight."

"Don't be a fool," said the man.

That brown mane of Jeremy's began to stiffen. He climbed softly into the dingey, paddled noiselessly across, using a scull like a paddle, and lay off under the willows, a wilful and obstinate listener, the silent third in the tragedy.

They had gone into the house. The casement window of the sitting-room was open, and so near to the river that the Romancer could hear all that was said.

He was conscious at once of the girl's anguish. There was scorn in it and pride, also a quiet despair that walked blindly in a white sheet. All that Jeremy had expected to hear he heard, even the cynical epigrams that a man like Blagden can utter.

"You know I never knew," she kept saying to him; "I trusted you, and you know it."

"My dear girl," said the man, "I should like to believe in the pretty fable. When a man of the world takes a bungalow on the river, innocence flies out of the window. Please, you're not a fool."

"You cad," said the Romancer.

The girl was speaking again.

"What am I to do? Haven't I a right to ask you that?"

"I told you in my letter. I have paid all the bills to the middle of

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the month, and you can stay here till October."

"And then?"

"Why, then it's the end of the holiday."

"What a beast you are," she said with quiet scorn; "how I ever imagined— Oh, yes, you were so kind and so cunning. And I—was ill and hard up."

"You've had a holiday," he said.

"A holiday! Don't you see that you have—that you have—"

"Who's to know?" asked the man.

Then Jeremy pulled softly up the river and waited. He heard Blagden come down to the boat, heard the splash of his sculls, and Jeremy rowed slowly ahead of him till the island was out of sight. Then he lay across the river and waited for the other boat to come up.

"That you, Blagden?"

The man splashed with his sculls.

"Who the deuce's that?"

"Someone who's been through hell in France, that's all," said Jeremy.

"Come out on the bank and talk."

"You go to —" said Blagden.

"Thanks," said the Romancer, "the where or the how don't matter; the only thing that matters is the why."

In that quixotic water battle Jeremy came near a ducking, perhaps death, for Blagden was a strong beast and quite ready to be violent.

"Get out of the way, will you?" he said as Jeremy ran the dingey alongside.

"I don't happen to be a woman, Blagden."

He was standing up, holding a length of rope knotted at the end.

"Get out of the way, you fool."

Blagden jabbed with a scull, and the blade of it caught Jeremy on the chin. He overbalanced and went down, but the sturdy little dingey refused to be flustered and saved the Romancer from a ducking.

Blagden was sculling on.

"It's going to be a bumping race, is it!" said Jeremy, sitting down to his sculls.

Blagden's boat was faster than the dingey, but the Romancer had been something of a sculler in his day, and he was more wiry and fit than Blagden and in a most ferocious temper. He stuck to his man, and drew level when his condition began to tell.

Blagden stopped sculling.

"What the devil do you want?" he asked.

"I want to hurt your body," said the Romancer; "I don't suppose anything would hurt your soul."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, nothing. What's it matter? It's just one of those queer coincidences that ought to be rather disconcerting to a cad. Now, are you coming out?"

"Oh, all right," said Blagden savagely.

Jeremy got hurt in that battle, so hurt that his lips were stretched white over his teeth and the stomach of him felt twisted and empty, but he was more than a mere body—rather a saint aflame. He fought till he had this violent beast down and beaten, and then he flayed him with that rope.

Jeremy went back to his boat and his tent; his mouth was bleeding; he had a huge bruise over his ribs; and a torn strip of muscle somewhere hurt him every time he moved. One sleeve was off his Norfolk jacket, and his shirt was slit open to the waist. He had a flask of whisky in his tent; and he took a mouthful of it neat, for Blagden had knocked him to bits before the fierce saint in Jeremy had triumphed. Then he filled his canvas washing-basin, and sluiced the cold water over his head and face.

The moon was rising, a great white full moon, when Jeremy crossed to the island. There was no light in any of the windows, but someone, who was sitting at the open casement, heard the Romancer's footsteps on the path.

"So you have come back!" said the voice of Oriana.

Jeremy stood still. He had for-

Oriana of the Bungalow

gotten that she might mistake him for Blagden.

"Yes, I have been up the river, Miss Mewburn, and I wondered whether you would—sing—to-night."

She answered him in a very gentle, steady voice.

"I'm rather tired. I'm—I'm glad you were up the river—"

The big soul stirred in Jeremy.

"I wasn't," he said.

He heard her draw a deep breath.

"I hoped that I might have been spared that," she said, "so now you know—perhaps—"

"I know only one thing," answered the Romancer; "something very wonderful has happened."

"Oh, don't," she cried like a wounded thing; "it's impossible, absurd!" For his voice was the voice of a lover.

Jeremy stood very still.

"Well, it's the truth," he said; "you need not tell me the story; it has written itself in my heart. Let me come and see you to-morrow."

She was weeping, but he did not know it.

"Perhaps, to-morrow," she steadied her voice for those two words, and Jeremy went back to his tent.

There is no doubt that the Romancer owed all the future to the bruises Blagden had given him and the uncomprising rigour of his camp-bed. He was awake before dawn, and up and dressing when the day broke. A white mist covered the river; and the dawn was raw and cold, and one of those cold September dawns that give a presage of winter. The flap of Jeremy's tent was not closely laced, and through the gap in the lacings he saw a figure moving in the mist across the water.

It was Oriana. She had unfastened the red canoe, and Jeremy saw her step into it, sit down, and push off from the landing stage. She had no paddle, but let the boat drift with the stream, her hands resting on the gunwale.

There was but one end to such a drift down stream—the weir.

Jeremy did not shout to her; the thing seemed too tragic for mere noise, but he cursed those dew-tightened loopings of the tent flap. The sculls were in the dingey, and he pulled up the painter-peg; it was quicker than unfastening the wet rope. The red canoe was drifting round the bend when Jeremy started after it.

She heard the splash of his sculls, and looked back for a moment; but she did nothing to stay the tragic drift of her surrender.

Jeremy kept watch over his left shoulder. He could hear the wet thunder of the weir rising in the white silence of the dawn. The red canoe was drifting broadside with the current, some fifty yards away, and about two hundred from that line of white water. Jeremy saw that it could be done—that it had to be done.

He caught the canoe when it was fifty yards from the weir. The Lady of Shallot was looking up at him with the frightened, asking eyes of a child.

"Why were you awake?"

"Ask God," he said, laying hold of the canoe.

Yet for a moment she contended with him.

"Let go. Oh, please let go! It's better, so much better."

"Then we will go over together," said the Romancer; "you are not going alone."

And then she broke down utterly.

"But my ideal of life—has gone," she said.

"It hasn't," said the man. "I have hold of it," and he leant over and lifted her into the dingey.

They were only twenty yards from the weir. Jeremy got to his sculls, and paddled hard up stream. The girl was looking back at the red canoe. They saw it reach the glassy curl of the weir top, pause, roll on one side, and disappear.

"Explicit," said the man; "you won't want it again. This old tub is steadier."

WARWICK DEEPING.

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Story Teller
Dec 1921

By Warwick Deeping

"Janet walked out of the garden, thinking of the little old woman in black. 'I wonder who——?'"

"She stood still on the edge of the orchard, looking at the snow. There should have been footsteps here, but there were no footsteps—not a mark on the snow!"



STEPHEN BLAKE sat at his desk in the library of the Friary.

He was irritable and he was worried—a lonely man for whom too much loneliness was ceasing to be good. The lamp standing on the desk threw a circle of yellow light about him, but the rest of the room was in semi-darkness. The library

was the oldest room in a very old house, vaulted with stone, the vaulting supported by four pillars that were painted a dark brown to match the wainscoting. A log fire burned rather sluggishly on the and-irons in the open fireplace. Snow was falling, and an occasional flake made its way down the great chimney and hissed upon the fire.

Blake had found a letter waiting for him when he had returned at dusk after a long tramp over the home farm, and he was sitting at his desk reading this letter.

"DEAR MR. BLAKE," it ran, "I am still waiting for a reply from you with regard to the mortgage on the Friary. I suppose it is your intention to pay off the mortgage? I shall be glad of an early reply from you. Yours faithfully,

"FREDERICK HAGGARD."

There was no studied truculence in the letter, and yet it roused in Blake a slow and unreasonable anger. Life had been difficult for him during the last six months, and his temper was beginning to

chafe. Untoward things had happened to him with an unexpectedness and yet with a regularity that almost had suggested some mysterious enemy. His wheat crop had failed; two of his pedigree cows had developed tuberculosis; a rubber company in which he had invested several hundred pounds had gone into liquidation. Six weeks ago Toby, his favourite Airedale, had been found dead in the garden. A month later the old tithe-barn had been burnt to the ground, and no one had been able to explain the origin of the fire.

"Confound the draught!"

He felt a cold wind blowing upon the back of his neck, and he rose, walked to the door, and pushing a mat against it, returned to his chair. He had scribbled a few sentences in pencil on a sheet of paper when that sense of chilliness at the back of his neck again distracted his attention. This time he crossed to the window and drew the curtains, and after throwing some wood on the fire, returned to his desk.

"DEAR MR HAGGARD," he wrote, "Of course I intend to clear up the mortgage——"

Then he paused, looking over his shoulder, and put a hand to the back of his neck. That inexplicable draught was still flowing past him; he felt it like a cold breath upon his skin.

Blake frowned.

"This is queer!" he thought.

And then, suddenly, he felt cold—physically chilled. He shivered, and, standing up, looked quickly round the room as though he ex-

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pected to see the door standing open, or a curtain being bulged in by the wind. But there was nothing, absolutely nothing.

Blake picked up the lamp, and, carrying it round the room, examined the windows and the door. He had a feeling that he was not alone. He stood by one of the stone pillars, listening, a little perplexed. The fire had begun to make a cheerful blaze, the flames leaping up into the black throat of the chimney, and throwing a shimmer of light upon the old wainscoting. Blake smiled. "I must have got chilled," he thought, "walking round the farm."

He carried the lamp back to the desk, and going to the cupboard by the fireplace, took out a glass, a whisky decanter and a syphon, and mixed himself a drink. The spirit warmed him; so did the fire. He went back to his desk and re-read Haggard's letter.

It seemed to him more insolent, more calculatingly truculent than when he had read it for the first time. He was conscious of a sudden rush of anger, a sense of fullness in the head. He seemed to see Haggard in a red blaze of hatred, Haggard with his swarthy supercilious face, his thin mouth and opaque eyes.

"It's deliberate!" cried the voice of his anger, "caddishly deliberate! Haggard has been waiting for this—waiting till I had a bad year! I'll tell him something."

He sat all screwed up in his chair, his knees pressing against the desk as he wrote that letter to Frederick Haggard. It was a defiance, a violent accusation, the letter of a man whose self-control had given way and whose brain felt strangely sore, as though it had been touched with a hot wire. A few minutes later he was standing in the hall, calling for his housekeeper.

"Mrs. Marlot—Mrs. Marlot!"

His voice made an angry and echoing sound in the old house.

"What is it, Mr. Stephen?"

She looked surprised—almost frightened.

"Send Jack to Haggard's with this letter."

"He can go when he has had his tea, sir."

She took the letter and withdrew, puzzled by his anger and his excitement, for Blake was a quiet, sunny-tempered man, with little of the spoilt child in him. Blake had returned to the library and pushed an armchair up to the fire. An unaccountable drowsiness attacked him. He fell asleep.

And Blake dreamed a dream. He was in this same chair, lying strangely helpless and relaxed, with his back towards the long vaulted room and yet able to see all that part of it that lay behind him. He was conscious of no astonishment at his being able to see things out of the back of his head, for dreams are like that. He noticed the books, the brown-black wainscoting, the turkey carpet, the stone pillars, the desk and chair. It appeared to be an empty room, and then—something came out of nothing, and he saw figures there.

At first they were mere grey transparencies; he could see through them. But presently they grew solid and distinct. One was the figure of a little old woman in a black dress and a white sun-bonnet; the other, the figure of a man in the red coat of a soldier, a man with a swollen and clumsy head and pale eyes that were inexpressibly evil. He had a great scar on his right cheek, and his face was lead colour.

These two figures were quarrelling—the big man in red, and the old lady in black—and Blake became vaguely aware of the fact that the quarrel was about himself.

"He belongs to me," said the man; "I was here first."

The white sun-bonnet seemed to shake.

"You shan't have him. You make men evil, so that you may enjoy the evil. He shall not listen to you."

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"Old fool, I am stronger than you. I use his passions, the passions I put into his body. They make me warm."

"I shall use love. Love is stronger than hate."

To the brain of the dreamer the figures appeared to grow dim as they came quivering and floating towards his chair. The old woman's hands were raised, as though she wished to thrust the soldier aside. The face of the man was the face of a devil.

Blake felt himself touched by something that clung like gossamer. Then blackness seemed to fill the room. He heard voices.

"Help—help!"

"Out, old fool! I am in him now, in his body, in his brain."

"We will drive you out, we who think good thoughts."

"You have not the strength. I want to kill—kill."

When Blake woke in his chair the fire was almost out and the hands of the clock pointing at seven. He sat up, feeling curiously heavy and stupid. He remembered nothing of the dream.

On pulling back the curtains of his bedroom window Stephen Blake saw a white world, a world of snow under a clear blue sky. The old yews in front of the house were crusted with beautiful lace-work. Beyond the gleaming undulations of the park the tall poplars about the Black Water flashed their tops in the early sunlight.

"The ice should be bearing to-day," he thought.

Blake dressed, and looked out his skates from the cupboard under the stairs. He was feeling the edges of the steel blades when he remembered Haggard's letter and his own savage reply to it, and a queer yelp of anger sounded in him, like the cry of a wolf over the snow.

"Curse Haggard! I'll forget him and go skating."

At breakfast he bethought himself of Janet up at Thornhaugh Farm,

and the thought of her smoothed away his anger. She was a pleasantly soothing vision, was Janet, with her shapely little head, her blue and laughingly loyal eyes, her pure mouth, and her gently determined chin. Why shouldn't he walk across to the farm by way of the Black Water, and ask her to skate with him? He had promised to teach her to skate. And then his anger against Haggard flamed out afresh. He—Stephen Blake—wanted to marry Janet, but the bad luck of the past year had held him silent, and Haggard was not making the future any more bright.

Blake had some business to attend to, his bailiff to see, and a letter to write, and it was ten o'clock before he started for the Black Water. As he neared the great pool he saw a figure sweeping and circling over the ice, graceful as a skimming bird. It was a woman in a bright cerise-coloured jersey, a white skirt, fur gauntlets and cap; Isabelle Frevil of Mere Hall.

Blake hesitated. If it is possible for a man to be lured and tempted by evil in the shape of a woman, then Blake was tempted by Isabelle Frevil. She was restless, swarthy handsome; a creature whose fascination relied upon a magnetic and provoking insolence, and who made men follow her as sparks follow the wind.

She waved to Blake.

"Hallo! It's splendid here."

Blake waved his cap, and thought of Janet. And then he heard the clink of metal against metal, and saw another man walking over the snow—a tall man whose smile seemed a sneer. It was Frederick Haggard.

They looked at each other like angry dogs, and Blake heard a voice crying in him, "She has lips like fire. Go and take her from him, take her from your enemy." He sat down on the snowy bank of the pool and began to fasten on his skates. Haggard had bought a pair of boots with his skates already fixed to them. He sat down by Blake.

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"You had my letter?"

Haggard smiled, showing his teeth.

"What has upset your temper, Blake? It does not do to lose your temper when you owe a man money."

Blake was having trouble with one of his skates, and he saw that Haggard would be ready to take the ice before him.

"I can pay up and lose my temper, Haggard, if I please. When a man is a cad——"

"Shut up, you ass."

Isabelle Frevil floated down on them like a skimming, fire-coloured bird. She felt the angry rivalry of these two men playing about her in the tense and frozen air, and it pleased her.

"Come along—one of you."

Haggard stepped down on to the ice and swept her away. He was a fine skater, almost as fine a skater as Isabelle Frevil, and Blake watched them between his fumbings with the refractory skate. He was angry, angry with the sudden, heedless anger of a wild man.

They sailed past him, and Isabelle Frevil called to him laughingly.

"Hurry up, slow-coach."

He caught Haggard's thin smile like a knife pointed at his throat.

The skate was on at last, and Blake took the ice and swerved away towards the island at the far end of the lake. He wanted to test his swiftness and his strength, and there was a mad voice urging him on. The great poplars grew thick upon the island, and in the narrow channel to the south of it Blake saw a circle of black water. He remembered the superstition in the village that the water never froze at that particular spot. It was said that a friar and a woman had drowned themselves there in some century that was gone, and that the deep water held a curse. Certainly the circle of unfrozen water was there, a strange black eye of mystery in the sheeted silver of the ice.

Blake swung round. He saw that Isabelle Frevil was alone and skat-

ing towards him, Haggard following with great gliding steps, as though racing to recapture her. She called to Blake.

"Who can catch me?"

She swept up to him, turned, and was away again, eluding Haggard, who pulled up with grinding skates, and pivoted close to Blake. They looked into each other's eyes. Then they started after Isabelle Frevil, racing each other with a kind of silent ferocity.

Blake won by a yard. He caught her hands and carried her off, with a little laugh at Haggard's stale grin. And so this woman played with them half the morning, inflaming the anger that had already risen between these two men.

Meanwhile, up at Thornhaugh Farm, Janet Culverdale was sitting by the fire in the panelled parlour, altering a dress. Now and again she turned her head to look at the white landscape, and sometimes she sat and listened. For Janet was fay. She felt something or someone near her, a strange presence in that warm, firelit room, and yet a something that seemed a part of herself. Her sensitive eyes were wide open, her profile attentive and a little perplexed. And then a picture—a mind picture—seemed to form in her consciousness. She saw a little old woman in white sun-bonnet walk across the orchard and disappear behind the hedge.

Janet got up, leaving her work lying in the chair. "It's strange," she thought to herself, and almost immediately she seemed to see inside herself the face of Stephen Blake. And in the eyes of the man she loved she saw anger, a sort of madness.

Janet went upstairs and put on her hat and coat. A path led down the orchard to the home paddock, and Janet walked out of the garden, thinking of the little old woman in black.

"I wonder who——?"

She stood still on the edge of the orchard, looking at the snow. There should have been footsteps here, but

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there were no footsteps—not a mark on the snow! It was very strange—inexplicable!

She went down through the orchard and into the home paddock. At the swing-gate in the far hedge she met Stephen Blake. There was that very look in his eyes which she had seen in her vision of him, a look of anger, almost of madness.

"Janet——!"

She smiled at him—there are some smiles that are full of healing, and Janet's eyes seemed to pour soft light into the dark corners of Blake's soul. The expression of his face changed; the evil died out of him.

"I was coming to see you."

She glanced at his skates.

"So the ice is bearing?"

"Yes. I want to give you a lesson."

He looked into her deep, tranquil eyes.

"This afternoon?" he asked her.

"I should love it. You see, I shall be busy all to-morrow—I have to go and help decorate at school for the children's party."

They passed the afternoon together, a laughing, happy couple, all alone on the sheeted silver of the Black Water. When the red sun went down behind the poplars, Blake walked back with her to Thornhaugh and had tea with Janet and her father. He felt serene and secure, almost forgetful of the strange blood-rage of the morning. The moon rose as he trudged home over the snow, thinking of what home would be when it meant Janet.

At the Friary he found a letter lying on the oak table in the hall, a letter from Haggard. He picked it up calmly and went into the library, where an invisible something waited for him. Never—save in that dream-state of his—was he to see that red-coated man with the swollen and ungainly head.

Blake sat down in front of the fire and opened Haggard's letter. A moment later he glanced over his left shoulder and put his hand to

the back of his neck. He had felt that current of cold air, experienced a sensation of being touched by some filmy substance. He shifted his chair, and resettled himself to the reading of Haggard's letter. It was the acrid concoction of an angry and sarcastic man who knew how to poison a phrase, and its effect upon Blake was abrupt and extraordinary. His anger became conscious murder, a rage that reached out for the other man's throat. He shook. His brain felt a blaze of blood.

Then he threw the letter on the fire.

"All right, Mr. Haggard, we'll see! If Isabelle Frevil would like to watch a man thrashed, she shall have that pleasure to-morrow."

He glanced up at the mantelshef, and saw Janet's face there—the last photograph of herself that she had given him. Her deep and tranquil eyes looked into his.

"Janet," he said aloud, almost like a child crying for its mother, "I wish you were here—now—and for ever."

Blake slept badly that night, and the black mood was still upon him when he drew back his bedroom curtains and looked at the world of snow. Over yonder the poplars about the Black Water seemed to stretch out thin and beckoning hands, and he felt drawn to the place by some evil spell. He stood at the window, staring, fists clenched. Haggard! Yes, Haggard. He would smash Haggard in the face.

Some intangible force seemed to be pushing him towards that strip of frozen water. Three times that morning he walked across the snow to the lake, restless, vaguely excited, waiting for his two fellow players on that stage of ice. They did not come. He remembered that Janet was at the school, helping to decorate it for Christmas, and some saving impulse sent him there in search of her, but Janet had gone home to Thornhaugh Farm for

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dinner. The disappointment of not seeing her depressed him. There was a moment when he felt afraid, acutely afraid, though what the thing he feared was he could not say. At lunch he drank heavily, and then dozed till three o'clock in a chair before the fire.

At three o'clock he got up briskly, picked up his skates and walked out of the house as though someone had called him. The poplars of the Black Water stood tall and dark against the snow, and Stephen Blake went straight towards them. He saw two figures moving upon the ice, the figures of Haggard and Isabelle Frevil.

Janet was in the schoolroom weaving chains of yew and laurel when she heard a voice that seemed to be speaking inside her brain. She remained quite still, in the attitude of one who listens. There were ten or more women and girls working with her in the room, but for the moment she had ceased to be aware of them or of the chain of green foliage that lay across her lap. Everything was blurred. She sat listening to the voice.

"Go down to the Black Water," it said. "Go down to the Black Water."

She rose and left the schoolhouse.

The sun was setting; the whole west was a great redness and the snow, tinged with the colour of it, glowed like the inside of a shell. As Janet crossed the park a woman met her, swinging her skates so that the blades clashed together. They stared at each other, but did not speak.

Janet hurried on. She felt drawn towards those blue-black trees and that sheet of silver by a sense of tragedy, a conviction that some disastrous event had to be prevented. A voice cried: "Rescue, rescue!" Yet this tense, white world was infinitely silent.

Suddenly she saw the pool, and on it the swiftly moving figures of two men. They were close together,

skating side by side, and yet it seemed to her that they were like two fierce animals galloping shoulder to shoulder, and snarling their hatred before flying at each other's throats. Their bodies were bent forward as they swept up and down the ice. Face was half turned to face. She heard their voices, voices of anger. The sound of them made her break into a run.

If ever a man was possessed by the spirit of murder, Stephen Blake was that man. He was inflamed with the lust to hurt and to kill. He saw nothing but this other man's furious eyes, and the lips stretched tight over malicious teeth. He saw the lean throat with its bulging voice-box that waited for his fingers.

They were sweeping down towards the island, quite blind for a moment to their physical surroundings, obsessed by their hatred of each other. Their words were blows, their faces grey and old.

"Stephen——!"

At that moment they had swung into the narrow channel south of the island where that black circle of unfrozen water reflected the tops of the trees, and when Blake heard Janet's voice a very wonderful thing happened to him. He looked up and saw her standing on the bank, but she was not the Janet of Blake's normal consciousness. He saw a kind of blue-gold haze about her, a haze that seemed to glow more brightly about her head and bosom, a mysterious, shining radiance.

He straightened. He felt himself turning the blades of his skates so that they ploughed the ice and brought him to a standstill. And in the flash of his new consciousness he saw the circle of black water and Haggard skating with his face turned sideways.

"Haggard—look out! That hole man!"

His own voice surprised him. It rang clear and human in the frosty air, but its cry came too late. Haggard saw his danger, tried too

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sharp a swerve and fell, striking his head. His body slid along the ledge of ice and slipped into the water. The pool heaved with a black and oily motion, and little ripples lapped up over the edge of the ice.

Haggard's face appeared. It looked dazed. He was making feeble clutches at the edge of ice. Blake had thrown himself flat, and was crawling towards the hole.

"Catch hold, Haggard. Gently."

He reached for the dazed man, got him by the collar, and managed to drag him out on to the ice, but under their combined weight a whole wedge of it broke away and left them in the water.

Blake kept his head and his hold on Haggard. He helped the other man to the crust of the ice and made him rest his arms upon it.

"Janet——"

He looked up and saw her on the bank, dragging a big poplar bough that had been torn off during the autumn gales. She came down on to the ice, pushing the bough before her until its twigs were brushing the faces of the two. Haggard had recovered his wits, and was able to help himself. Blake made him lay hold of the bough, and the trick served. He put an arm under Haggard's legs and Janet drew him slowly out of the water and across the ice until they were close to the bank. Left to himself Blake was able to scramble out.

Haggard met him on the bank, a Haggard whose face was dead white,

but whose eyes shone. He held out a hand.

"Thanks, Blake. That's all wiped out. I'm sorry I——"

"Man, it was all my fault."

They shook hands, and turning—both of them—to Janet, stood looking at her in astonishment. For she seemed quite unaware of them. Her eyes were fixed on something that was visible to her between the trunks of the two great poplars, a something that was invisible to the two men. They saw her smile. She put up her face, like a child taking and giving a kiss.

For a moment these two men stood awed, wondering. Then Blake went to her and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Janet."

She turned and looked at him with eyes that seemed to withdraw themselves from gazing on some dream world.

"Dear Stephen. She says we shall be happy now."

"Who says that?"

"The old lady with the white bonnet. Oh, you are all wet——!"

She touched him and smiled at Haggard, who was shivering.

"Run—run home. Take off your skates."

It may have been a coincidence, but the men knelt down to remove their skates, and in kneeling there they felt that they were in the presence of some mystery that was beyond their understanding.

WARWICK DEEPING.

One of the best Novels ever written by

SAX ROHMER

Entitled

"THE DAUGHTER OF HUANG CHOW"

appears complete in the

Christmas Cassell's Magazine

ON SALE NOV. 30

THE EMPTY CAR.

(Copyright.)

By **WARWICK DEEPING.**

Author of "Trelewney's Z Rays," "The
Professor's Secret," "No. 1003
Company," "Sharks," &c.,
&c.,

I had been coasting down a stiff hill through the beech woods, when I came across the Red Haired Girl struggling with a grey two-seater car outside a solitary cottage.

I pulled up, and put my machine against the wall.

"Can I help?"

She had been winding in the starting handle, and she was all flushed and panting.

"The car stopped suddenly, and I can't start her."

"Have you far to go?"

She looked at me with a sudden darkening of her big black eyes.

"O, not far," she said vaguely. "I'm expected to supper with some friends near here."

I took off my coat and got to work on the car, and while I looked for the cause of the trouble, the girl fluttered about the car like a restless moth.

"It's very good of you to take this trouble."

"Not a bit of it. I wonder if you could turn the handle slowly; I want to see if these plugs spark."

"O, yes."

She fluttered round, and I caught a glimpse of her pale face looking at me over the top of the radiator. There was fear, and a horror of suspense on that face of hers, just as I had seen there on faces in some shell-smashed trench in France.

"Now, please."

"Now, please."

I found that the plugs sparked all right.

"It must be the carburettor; I shall have to take out the jet."

She made a queer little tragic sound that was like a sob of impatience.

"O, how maddening! Can I help?"

"Can you find me a small box-spanner. There should be a special one for the jet."

"Yes, I know."

While I was at work on that carburettor I could not help wondering what all this impatience of hers meant. The girl puzzled me; so did the fear I had seen in her eyes. What was she doing out here in one of the wildest parts of Surrey, alone, and in such a mood of tragic haste?

"It's a plugged jet all right," I said; "now we are at the bottom of the mystery."

"O, thank God," and then she tried to laugh it off. "I have a horror of gypsies, you know, and I want my supper."

In another ten minutes I had the engine running. My lady of the Red Hair had climbed in and was at the wheel. She leant over to shut the door, and even as she thanked me she could not hide her impatience.

"I'm so grateful to you. Good-bye."

The rear back wheel missed my foot by not less than an inch.

I mounted my bike and followed the car. She drove very fast down that hill, but slowed up towards the bottom, and turning in her seat for a moment, she saw that I was following. About fifty yards further on a rough lane branched off to the right, and she swung her car into that lane, giving me a wave of the hand as though for good-bye.

Now, I happened to know that part of Surrey extraordinarily well, and I knew that the lane went northwards.

...very extraordinarily well, and I knew that the lane went nowhere, and that it ended in a mere woodland track. It struck me that the girl wanted me out of the way, that she was afraid of being followed, and that she had doubled to let me pass.

One obeys queer instincts at times, without knowing the why or wherefore. I rode on for about two hundred yards, spotted a gap in the hedge, and tumbling off, dragged my machine through the gap, and stood there in an ambush, waiting. I waited ten minutes before I heard the sound of a car. It came up the hill the engine all out, and flashed by my hiding-place. That settled it. I followed that car. I wanted to find out where she was going. The car was out of sight when I topped the rise and struck a stretch of straight road between rows of tall beeches. Half a mile further on a by-road broke sharply to the left. I dismounted, and examined the sandy surface. It had been raining, and the wet sand took and held the tread pattern of a tyre. She had turned up that road; the pattern of the non-skid tyres on the back wheels betrayed her.

About a mile on, at the top of a hill, I discovered the empty car. I should have missed it had I not been on the alert, and watching the wheel tracks in the wet and sandy surface. It was a very solitary spot, with a great cliff of black spruces on the left, and an open beech wood on the right. The girl had driven her car into the beech wood, and left it behind the sweeping branches and the trunk of a huge tree.

I put my bike in an old dry ditch, sat down, and waited. The stillness was utter and supreme; there was no wind moving, and the trees might have been carved out of stone. I could see the empty car, and I wondered whether she would come back to it, and what had

would come back to it, and what had become of her. But she did not come back.

What business was it of mine? None at all, and yet some strong impulse persuaded me to interfere. The girl might have stolen the car, been seized with panic, and abandoned it here. Or she might be meeting a man, in secret. The thought annoyed me, and most absurdly. What business was it of mine?

I left my bicycle in the ditch and strolled up the lane and under the black shadow of the spruces, nor had I gone very far before I came upon what appeared to be a private road plunging straight into the spruces. It looked grass-grown and derelict, but it told me what I had forgotten. There was a house here, and I remembered the place, a great grey house built on the top of the hill and surrounded by woods. You could see its chimneys and upper windows from the road on the opposite side of the valley.

There was the house, big, black, and lightless against a saffron sky. I saw a couple of stone pillars and a gate directly in front of me. The drive swept to the gate between two stretches of grass, and on the left an old yew tree stood like a black rock, about five yards from the road.

I was standing well under the shadow of the spruces when I saw something move under the yew. A figure in a brownish cloak was leaning against the trunk and looking round it towards the house. It was the girl of the grey car.

Her back was towards me. I can't say what made me do it, or what gave me the cheek to do it, but I walked towards her over the grass. She did not hear me, so intent was she on watching the house.

I meant to pretend that I had just strolled up there by chance, and that I had not seen her until I was near the yew.

"Hallo! I beg your pardon."

I shall never forget the look on her face.

MISS: I beg your pardon."

I shall never forget her face when she turned on me. It was all white and startled, a face of fear and of desperate recklessness. But it was not her face alone that made me pause. Her right hand went up, and that hand held a little black automatic pistol

"It's—you."

"Yes," I said, "it's me," feeling that I had stumbled into the strangest sort of cinema show

I could hear her breathing hard, and her hand waved up and down a little

"How dare you follow me?"

"I'm sorry," I said, "but it was quite—"

"Go, go at once."

I had faced worse things than that pistol, and I felt my heart go out to her under the eyes of her despair. She was such a frightened child at the game, and yet so fiercely and pathetically in earnest

"I'm sorry," I said, "you can shoot me if you like, but I am not going."

"Then I shall shoot. You are just a spy."

"I'm a plain infantry officer home on leave, that's all. I know it must seem sheer insolence on my part, but I saw you were frightened about something."

"I'm not a bit frightened."

"Let me tell you that I have been scared to death many times. I know what it looks like."

That hand of hers was shaking.

"Are you going?" she asked.

"No."

"I'll give you while I count three."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I can't go."

"One."

"I can't funk it."

"Two."

"I felt that I wanted to help."

"Three."

She uttered the "Three" in a shrill little voice, stared at me a moment then dropped that pistol of hers and turned

dropped that pistol of hers, and burst into tears.

For a moment she had me on the edge of saying that I would go, but I wanted to stay now, wanted it more fiercely than I could remember wanting anything in my life before. She looked so broken and desperate and bewildered, and she made me feel helpless and an interfering beast.

"I'm sorry," I said again.

"What's the use of saying that?" she wept.

"Why not tell me why I'm in the way."

"How can I tell you?"

"I might go, clear out, if you could convince me that I ought not to be here, and that you are in no danger."

She looked at me suddenly with those big eyes of hers, all black in her white face.

"I'll tell you, if you are an officer and a man of honour."

"My name is Major Abinger, John Abinger. You may know the name. I have a place near here. I give you my word of honour that I'll clear out if you can convince me."

She held out an appealing hand.

"You are preventing me saving some one from shame."

"And who is that some one?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes."

"The man who was to be my husband."

I was staggered. I walked up and down once or twice, and then came back to her under the yew.

"Don't you think me a beast. Perhaps something more than blind chance made us meet to-night. I want you to tell me."

She had covered her face with her hands.

"How cruel you are."

"No, do you think it is nothing but vile enmity. Tell me, are you going to stay?"

... as you think it is nothing but vile curiosity. Tell me, are you going to use that pistol?"

She uncovered her face and looked at me with the tragic intensity of a child.

"If necessary, yes. But it is a threat, something to make him turn back. O, what am I saying?"

I was deeply moved.

"I don't know your name," I said; "I know nothing but the fact that some queer chance has thrown us together. You say you want to save a man from something, but if you were to use that pistol, think what it might mean to you."

"I have thought of that," she said brokenly. "I don't think I have much to live for."

She added: "But I'm English. I have a sort of pride. Can't you understand?"

"I understand," I said very gently. "And do you still ask me to go away?"

We stood looking at each other for a moment.

"You must go."

"You are meeting him here?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"There are people in that house, friends of his. I found it all out, only two days ago. I said I would give him one last chance, and he wired to me to meet him here."

"Is he in that house?"

"No. I expect that he will come by car."

"Forgive me—one more question."

"Well?"

"Is your husband an English officer?"

"Half-English. He is—he is a flying man."

And then I glimpsed it, and felt that I had my fingers on the thread of this mysterious affair.

"Will you tell me your name," I said; "I mean your Christian name?"

She faltered.

She faltered.

"Why should I, Major Abinger?"

"But won't you tell it me?"

"Estelle," she said.

I bent down and picked up the pistol that she had left lying there.

"I am going to keep this for a while," I said, "because I feel that if your voice cannot save this man, one of these bullets would be wasted. I am going to stay here out of sight and see fairplay. I shall not interfere, unless I am called for. And if you can save this man of yours—well, that's the end of it. The secret will be safe with me."

She stood looking at the ground. The sunset had faded, and it was growing dark.

"Somehow, I feel that I can trust you," she said.

I gave her my hand, and she held it a moment as though it were the hand of a friend.

"And now," I asked her, "what are you going to do?"

"I shall go to the house and wait," she said, with a slight shiver.

"It looks empty."

"No; I think there will be some one there—a friend of Otto's, I mean my fiance's."

I did not like that name, and I did not like the secrecy of the thing, and its smell of German cunning.

"Have you a whistle?" I asked her.

"A whistle!—what for?"

"I mean, if things went wrong, if you wanted help. I shall be somewhere about. Take this whistle of mine."

She faltered, and then took it. I saw that she had reason to be afraid.

"I'd give you back this pistol," I said, "only I'm sure that it would only make trouble. People shouldn't play with such things. It will be better with me."

She nodded.

I kept my place well hidden under the

I kept my place well hidden under the yew, and I watched her pass through the gate and walk up the carriage-drive to the house. She was no more than a dim brown shadow in the dusk when she reached the porch, and I lost her when she passed inside. A minute later I fancied I heard the sound of voices and the closing of a door. She had entered the house; I was certain of that.

I took out the magazine of the pistol and found that it held six cartridges. My wrist-watch told me that it was a quarter past ten. The moon was past its full, and would not be up just yet.

Time for this mysterious blackguard to arrive! I wondered what his game was, what particular piece of scoundrelism this girl of his had discovered. He had lost her love. And the oddness of it all struck me, and I laughed.

I sat there for half-an-hour, expecting Herr Otto to come trundling down that dark drive in a car, but nothing happened, and I began to grow restless. Perhaps he was in that house, had been there all the time. I got up and walked across the grass to the gate, for I wanted to see more of that house, to prowl round it and reconnoitre.

It had a terrace along its southern front, and there was a broad stretch of flat and open grass-land below the terrace, between it and the woods. I struck to the left under the shadow of the trees, and as I did so, I saw something queer happen to one of the upper windows of the house. An electric light was switched on suddenly and then turned off again, painting a momentary panel of yellow light in the blackness of the house's bulk. This happened five times.

The signal set me thinking. I was still thinking when I heard that sound, the drone of an aeroplane high up and away to the south-west. The sound came

to the south-west. The sound came nearer, and I saw that window flash out again and disappear.

Then the noise of the engine stopped like the chatter of a machine gun that has been knocked out by a well-placed shell.

"The devil," I said, "he's coming down!"

A moment later I saw the machine swinging black in a silver sky. The pilot was sweeping in big spirals, and the aeroplane descended like a huge bird, made one long fat swoop and landed, bumping for about fifty yards over the grass. A man climbed out, and I saw him go up a flight of steps that led to the terrace. A shuttered French window opened suddenly, and closed again as he disappeared inside.

I waited for a few seconds and then made a dash for the machine. I know a good deal about planes, both ours and the Germans, and as this machine loomed up ahead of me I realized that it was something new. Over there in France we had heard of the new "Scud Fighter," a machine that could do its 100 miles an hour, and was expected to play old Harry with the enemy. A flying boy had shown me a silhouette of the "Scud," and the aeroplane in front of me was as like it as its brother.

And then I think that I guessed Estelle's secret. That pretty fiance of hers was supposed to be piloting this new machine to France, but he was in the pay of the other people, and it was they who would get this "Scud." He meant to fly the thing over our lines, spin some yarn about having lost himself in a fog, land on German ground and take his money.

I played no monkey tricks with the machine, but went straight to the house, and I took my boots off before I climbed the steps and crossed the terrace. A

the steps and crossed the terrace. A streak of light showed between the edges of the shutters closing the window through which the airman had disappeared, and I had made up my mind that I had got to find out what was happening in that room.

I was close to the window and hugging the wall, when I heard Estell's voice passionate and pleading.

"You won't do it, Otto, you can't do it?"

"Don't be a fool," said a man's voice, "it would have been better for you if you had not been so inquisitive."

"Then I shall tell the truth."

"You can tell the truth in Germany," said the man. "That's why I asked you to come here. Do you think I am going to leave you behind?"

I heard Estelle cry out, and then the sound of a scuffle, and a voice angry and excited.

"The devil. Hold her hands. She must have friends out there; that's the meaning of that whistle."

"I've got her. Be quiet, confound you. Give me that tablecloth, Frits; we can tie her up in that. The sooner we get away the better."

I understand it all now, and my first impulse was to break in for I was in a grim rage at the thought of their mishandling of the child, and of the trick they meant to play on her, but a touch of shrewdness tempered my anger. They had come to suspect that she was not alone, they would be on the alert; they might kill her unless I could so contrive it that I had them guessing and surprised.

I made a dash across the terrace in my stocking feet, paused for a second on the steps, and then seeing that the shutters were still closed, I made a second dash across the grass for the machine. I saw the white shutters open as I

saw the white shutters open as I scrambled up into the body of the plane. but I was crouching down in the well of the observer's seat before those men came out upon the terrace.

They were carrying Estelle between them, and I lay in ambush, with that pistol ready, waiting for my chance. I could see that they were scared and in a desperate hurry to be up and off, for that whistle of mine had roused their suspicions.

They were close to the plane.

"Pass her up to me, Fritz. I'll climb up and take her." I felt his weight on the body of the "Scud" and next moment I had him covered.

"Hands up!"

But he was no tame man, and he dropped back off the machine, with a queer sort of snarling yell, and next moment he had blazed at me. The bullet ripped the air past my left ear, and I gave him one in return. My shot was luckier than his, for I saw his legs crumple under him, and he pitched forward on his face. The other fellow had no pistol, or he was too scared to use it; he bolted for the woods, and I gave a shout that was intended to hurry him.

"Close on him, boys, head him off."

I sprang down and had one look at Estelle's man, and then I turned to her. She lay very still while I set her free from the smother of stuff they had wrapped round her. She sat up, white, bewildered, her eyes still full of the horror of it all. I kept myself between her and that figure on the grass.

She did not speak. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Her eyes asked me that question, the question had to be answered.

"I couldn't help it," I said. "I had to fire. It was he who fired first."

She gave a little cry, and held out her

She gave a little cry, and held out her hands to me.

"O, my God! Is he dead?"

"Yea."

She did not speak for a while, but sat staring straight in front of her, with the moonlight in her eyes. I said nothing, for though my heart was big in me, I could not find the words I wanted. And

then, quite suddenly, she shivered as though she were cold, and began to cry like a lost child.

The man in me found its voice.

"O, take me away, please."

"I couldn't help it," I blurted; "some day perhaps, you will forgive me. This is my job now; I'm going to take you home to my mother."

She gave me her little cold hands.

"I have tried," she said, "I did try. And now it is all over. It wasn't your fault or mine. You saved me from that—O, take me away, please, I'm not strong enough to bear any more."

"But I'm strong enough for both of us," I said. And that is how I won my wife.

An Ordeal of Faith.

BY WARWICK DEEPING.



IT was a stormy night in April when Gordon Jamieson, of King's Malling, put out his study lamp, lit his candle, and, carrying with him a popular novel of the day, went up to bed. The wind was breathing restlessly about the house, beating through the great elms that lined the roadway, moaning over the sleeping town. Jamieson drew the curtains across the windows, glanced with an appreciative yawn at the bed, and assured himself that he would not be disturbed by the bell that night. He had been astir since three o'clock the same morning, and had successfully introduced one more red-skinned, blinking mortal to the sorrows and gladnesses of life.

Young Jamieson, for to the townsfolk he was still "young Jamieson," despite a few grey hairs over the temples, a virile face, and a grave manner, had won for himself a reputation for cleverness in that particular corner of the country. Great, long-limbed athlete that he was, success had persecuted him from his student's days, muzzling the mouths of hypercritical examiners, marking him out as a man of nerve and power among his fellows. With signal magnanimity young Jamieson had refused to ruin all the great ones of Harley Street by entering into competition with them as a man of means. Jamieson was built for a country life. He was a man of the moors and of the morning, keen-eyed and clean-hearted. He had purchased a practice at King's Malling from an antediluvian old surgeon to whom Lister seemed something of a charlatan.

Whether it was the grave confidence of his strong-featured face or the quiet masterfulness of his manner that served him, young Jamieson had won popularity in King's Malling. Success still importuned him, as did the many dear matrons who possessed marriageable daughters. Being a flourishing bachelor, he was boldly assailed with the dogma that a young doctor should be married in order to deserve the complete confidence of his fairer patients. Jamieson did not appear to be an impressionable being. He went his way with a grim and firm-lipped composure, courteous and

sympathetic, a monument of professional sanity.

Despite his prognostications, it was fated that the young doctor should enjoy no sleep that night. He was in the act of slipping into bed when the night-bell pealed in the passage below his room. Letting slip certain remarks that would not have edified the ears of his feminine admirers, he snatched his dressing-gown from the peg behind the door, took the candle, and went wearily downstairs. Passing through the surgery into the passage leading to the back door, he unlocked it and, shading the candle with his hand, looked out into the unpropitious night.

The indistinct figure of a man showed in the dusk. He touched his hat and held out a letter to Jamieson, who was shielding the spluttering candle behind the door.

"From Mr. Amoory, sir."

"Who?"

"Mr. Amoory of Firlands. I have a trap at the gate. You be to come at once."

Jamieson frowned at the bluntness of the man's remark, told him to wait, and, lighting the lamp in the surgery, cut the envelope with a spatula and drew out the letter.

"DEAR SIR,—My niece, Miss Vivienne Grey, has been taken suddenly and seriously ill. I think that she caught a chill two days ago. I shall be glad if you will come at once and see her.—Faithfully yours,

"ANTHONY AMOORY."

Jamieson folded up the letter and thrust it between the leaves of the ledger on the desk. Calling to the groom, and telling him that he would be with him in a few minutes, he went upstairs to dress with professional resignation, for Amoory's house was fully five miles from King's Malling.

It was past midnight when the dog-cart which had been sent for Jamieson turned in at the winding drive leading through pine-woods to the house. The doctor had been meditating on the nature of the case before him. Anthony Amoory, Esquire, was an old gentleman who had but lately settled in the neighbourhood, and had already won for himself an eccentric reputation. He was a great collector of china and old books, and was also reported to be a leading authority on the ancient civilizations of the East.

Jamieson was not unflattered at being summoned to attend the niece of so interesting and cultured a gentleman. King's Malling was not noted for intelligence, and Jamieson found himself in danger of intellectual starvation.

The house was long and low, painted white, with French shutters over the upper

Jamieson was in the act of scratching the monkey's head when he heard a slight cough behind him, and, turning, discovered a very good-looking old gentleman smiling gravely and holding out his hand.

"Dr. Jamieson, I believe."

The doctor ran his eyes curiously over the



"THE INDIAN-LOOKING FIGURE OF A MAN SHOWN IN THE DOOR."

windows. Jamieson was met by a manservant at the porch and ushered across the hall into the library, where a shaded lamp was burning. The room appealed to him instantly as the haunt of a man of unusual culture and of eccentric tastes. It was not every scholar who kept a monkey in an ornamental tub in one corner of his sanctum, a cage full of white rats on the table by the window, with several trays of Assyrian tablets waiting to be deciphered when the archaic inclination stirred in the scholar.

figure of the man before him. If he had expected to behold an aged and ape-faced patriarch with dirty nails and slovenly clothes, he was in every way disappointed of the vision. Anthony Amoory was a plump and peach-faced old gentleman with fine white hair, dressed in perfect taste, and boasting more the air of a retired general than a decipherer of cuneiform inscriptions.

"I regret having been compelled to disturb you, sir, at such an hour."

Jamieson bowed in his grave and restrained

fashion. The old gentleman's voice was peculiarly refined and sympathetic. He reminded the doctor of some old French grandee whose very clothes smelt of courtesy.

"It is no trouble, I assure you; we doctors——"

The white-haired Assyriologist cut him short with a debonair wave of the hand.

"Exactly, sir; you are excellent fellows. We value you when we are in trouble. My niece, Miss Grey, has become alarmingly unwell—a chill, I suspect, due to a motor-drive after tennis. I shall be grateful if you will see her at once."

He turned and bowed Jamieson towards the door with an expression of courtly concern that could brook no ephemeral delay. The doctor saw an elderly woman in a white cap and a black gown waiting for him in the hall. He imagined her to be the housekeeper, and the surmise proved correct. The woman led him up the stairs, where armour and many rare prints and pictures hung upon the walls, and along a gallery lined with carved chests, armoires, and inlaid cabinets. She stopped before a door, knocked, and entered. Jamieson followed her, treading softly despite his powerful bulk, quietly alert after the habit of his profession.

The room was a large one, and decorated in a medieval spirit. The wooden bed was covered with a green canopy embroidered with scarlet flowers, a carved hutch standing at the foot thereof. The walls were draped with tapestry; the polished floor spread with bright-coloured rugs and furs. A standard lamp of wrought iron, shaded by a crimson shade, stood beside the bed.

Jamieson, his professional sanity a little startled by his surroundings, saw a girl lying under the embroidered coverlet, her black hair loose upon the pillow, the flushed oval of her face shining up at him under the warm glow of the lamp. Her eyes, though bright with fever, were full of a wonderful intelligence. She held out her hand to Jamieson, and nodding to the housekeeper intimated that she should leave the room.

Jamieson set a chair beside the bed. As by habit his fingers had settled on the girl's wrist and he was looking in her face, noting every detail with the eye of a trained observer. She was very feverish—the hurried, soft-waved artery-beat told him that. There was an anxious and wistful expression on her face. When she spoke it was with an intense yet controlled earnestness that suggested trouble rather than fear.

"You are Dr. Jamieson?"

"Yes."

"They tell me you are very clever."

The flattered mortal smiled gravely.

"Have you seen Mr. Amoory?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you anything?"

Jamieson elevated his eyebrows, but instantly masked any expression of surprise.

"Mr. Amoory told me that you may have caught a chill," he answered.

"Yes."

"Tennis—and a motor-drive afterwards?"

"Yes, two days ago."

"I hope I shall soon set the matter at rest."

A peculiar expression of relief spread itself over the girl's face. She glanced towards the door, desiring Jamieson to call the housekeeper in again from the gallery. He did so, and then returned to the bed, taking out his thermometer and laying his stethoscope on the table beside him. He began to question her as to her symptoms and the onset of her illness. The girl answered him very frankly, fixing her eyes on his, and watching his face with spiritual intentness. Jamieson, accustomed to register swift and instinctive impressions of the psychological phenomena of life, felt, though he knew not why, that the Assyriologist's niece was concealing something from him while pretending to offer him the untarnished truth.

Jamieson proceeded to examine her, the grave lines of his strong face seeming to grow more marked as he leant over the bed with his broad back to the lamp. A slight contraction of the brows suggested that he was puzzled. Heart and lungs were sound enough; he had suspected pneumonia, but found no single physical sign to betray its presence. Hysteria, that great mimic of other diseases, suggested itself to him for the moment. He studied the girl's face with his keen and searching eyes, but confessed that she did not conform to the hysterical type. Five degrees of fever were against the hypothesis.

"You are sure that you have no pain anywhere?" he asked, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

She smiled at him and put her fingers to her forehead.

"Only here," she answered.

Jamieson's eyes had cast a rapid glance at her forearm. He thrust back the lace sleeve of her nightdress suddenly, disclosing several needle punctures in the skin, and a red flush below the hollow of the elbow.

"Pardon me, what are these?"

She had coloured confusedly, conscious of the questioning stare of his keen eyes, the alertness of his critical intelligence. Her lips quivered. Jamieson saw a slight shadow as of pain flit across her face. She was concealing something. Of that he felt assured.

stood grave-faced beside her. The look was full of a swift and wistful appeal that puzzled while it compelled his sympathy.

"You will see my uncle again?"

"Yes."

"Am I very ill?"



"HE THROST BACK THE FACE SHEET, DISCLOSING SEVERAL NEEDLE PUNCTURES IN THE SKIN."

"I had neuralgia some days ago."

"Yes?"

She turned restlessly in the bed, avoiding his eyes instinctively.

"I took morphia."

"Morphia!"

"Yes. It was foolish of me, but the pain was so bad. I used a hypodermic syringe. I will not do it again."

Jamieson was feeling her forearm with his fingers, still watching her narrowly, sensible of a suspicious sympathy drawing him towards his patient. He was the more convinced that she was concealing something from him, and the situation baffled his decision for the moment. Amoor's niece turned her head and looked at him as he

Jamieson pursed up his lips and glanced at her tentatively.

"You are feverish."

"Yes."

"Try and sleep; I will see you again early in the morning."

Jamieson descended the stairs, feeling like a man challenged by some problematical responsibility. Anthony Amoor was waiting for him in the library, wandering restlessly about the room. A pot of strong coffee stood on the table, with choice china, and a case of excellent cigars. The elder man pointed Jamieson to a chair, closed the door, and began to pour out the coffee.

"Well, sir?" he said, with the air of a man under severe and stoical self-restraint.

Jamieson took a cigar from the case that the Assyriologist offered him, shot a keen glance at Amoory as he lit a match, and held it with steady hand.

"Miss Grey has a high temperature," he said.

The Assyriologist sighed, and fumbled with the cigar-case.

"She tells me that she has taken morphia."

"What?"

"There are puncture marks in her right forearm."

Amoory had turned: his refined face was white and under strain. The two men eyed each other a moment in silence, the strong intellect in either keenly on the alert.

"Well, sir?" said the elder man, turning aside with a deep drawing of the breath.

Jamieson, still baffled, watched Amoory with critical intension.

"Frankly-----" he began.

"My niece's condition puzzles you?"

"Exactly."

"Thanks, sir; you are an honest man."

Amoory had turned again. His military moustache seemed to bristle almost fiercely

above his firm, clean-cut mouth. His grey eyes glistened. He faced Jamieson without flinching, squaring his shoulders, and speaking with the incisive brevity of a man sure of his own convictions.

"I will tell you, sir, from what my niece is suffering."

Jamieson bit his cigar and looked curiously at Amoory.

"From septicæmia—blood-poisoning."

"What?"

"Septicæmia, sir. Ask me no questions for the moment. If necessary—which God forbid—I will tell you in due course how she contracted the disease."

Jamieson, startled out of his professional composure, laid his cigar aside, drank down a cup of black coffee, and stood up so as to face the Assyriologist.

"Do you know, sir, what you are talking about?" he asked, with blunt brevity.

"Perfectly."

"And those needle-marks?"

The elder man's eyes flashed a look at the doctor's face.

"Dr. Jamieson," he said, "need I remind you that I am a gentleman and a man of honour? I know something of medicine, though you may believe me a mere collector of oddities and curios. I am trusting you,

and I desire you to trust me in return, to put faith in my assurances. I tell you that my niece is suffering from septicæmia—blood-poisoning—call it what you will. Are you willing to take my diagnosis on oath, and act upon it, or are you not?"

Jamieson's strong face looked grim.

"It is not usual, sir," he said, "for a doctor to take his diagnosis from a layman."

"Not usual, sir, no. But in this case the layman knows more than the physician."

Jamieson picked up his cigar, knocked off the ash, relit it, and smoked reflectively. He was attempting to master the spirit of antagonism that the elder man's attitude tended to inspire, and to grapple the extraordinary problem with which he was confronted. The trend of the interview was against all the instincts of his



scientific training. He began to wonder whether Amoory was mad, and whether he was justified in accepting so peculiar a responsibility.

"If you would be more frank with me, sir," he said, "my position would be easier."

The Assyriologist nodded sympathetically.

"The question is, sir," he answered, "are you willing to trust me or not? I have made my appeal to you as man to man. If you doubt my sincerity—then I can say no more."

Jamieson glanced at the elder man's face. Its expression of sorrowful reserve moved him strangely.

"I will accept the responsibility," he said.

Amoory held out his hand with a brave smile.

"You shall not regret it," he answered; "as a man of honour, I promise you that."

Within ten minutes Jamieson was on the road again to King's Malling, with the dim clouds scudding over the starless sky and the wind roaring through the woods with a fierce and melancholy abandonment. Dense darkness hid the road save where the light from the carriage lamps fell before them in double beams. The groom appeared tired and surly and disinclined to gossip. Jamieson, buttoning up his great-coat to the chin, lay back in the dog-cart deep in thought.

A peculiar feeling of dissatisfaction settled gradually upon him. He was neither a superstitious being nor a man given to sensational lines of thought, yet the sense of doubt and of restlessness increased in him as he saw the dark trees waving in the wind. The night was full of the hoarse mystery of the unknown. Its troubled turbulence seemed to exaggerate the peculiar impressions that the scenes at Firlands had wrought upon Jamieson's scientific and level consciousness. He found himself wondering again whether Anthony Amoory was mad, and whether it was not his duty to insist upon the immediate advice of an experienced consultant. Many bizarre and extravagant possibilities flitted through the doctor's brain. He recalled certain sensational tales that he had read in a contemporary magazine, describing the peculiar and exciting experiences of an impossible and priggish young physician. It was two in the morning, when all life is at low ebb. Jamieson felt the cold striking him even through his heavy coat. The moaning of the wind was enough to make any man miserable and credulous at such an hour.

The familiar glint of the bottles in the surgery and the warm glow of the lamp recovered Jamieson from his temporary

depression. He had ordered the groom to wait, intending to return immediately to Firlands. Lighting the glass spirit-lamp he sterilized his syringe and needles, took two bottles of serum from his instrument cabinet, and made up a mixture of carbolic acid and quinine. Finally he filled up a telegram form instructing a well-known firm in London to dispatch several phials of antistreptococcus serum by special messenger to King's Malling. Knocking up his groom, who slept in a cottage off the stable-yard, Jamieson told the man to send off the telegram as soon as the post-office was open, and to meet the midday trains at Malling Station till the special messenger arrived from town. The doctor was trusting to the information Amoory had given him. For the moment there was nothing more that he could do.

Jamieson's spirits recovered their vigour as he drove back again through the woods to Amoory's house. His thoughts reverted from the peculiar personality of the Assyriologist to the sensitive and wistful face of the girl lying in the great bed in the tapestried bedroom. Even here he was met by mystery, but by a mystery that did not lack in charm. Jamieson felt a peculiar sympathy drawing him towards Amoory's niece, even though he was convinced that she was concealing something from his knowledge. Her eyes were the eyes of a brave and unselfish woman. She seemed to possess that magic unapproachableness that characterizes those women who build up the ideals of the race. Jamieson felt markedly attracted towards her, and suddenly concerned in the danger that seemed to threaten her. A sense of elation woke in him as he realized that he was to champion her against disease. What if old Amoory were mad, he—Jamieson—was not a man to be frightened by any fear of incapacity! He was alive, capable, clever to his finger-tips, instinct with all that splendid intelligence that has compelled Nature to unlock her secrets to the passionate patience of man.

Amoory was walking to and fro restlessly in the hall when the dog-cart stopped before the white-fronted house. He gave Jamieson a hand-grip that bespoke his gratitude to the younger man for the trust he was willing to accord him.

"You are soon back," he said.

Jamieson, who was still studying the scholar with a view to discovering symptoms of mental aberration, pulled off his gloves and laid his great-coat across a chair.

"I have some serum with me," he said,

"and I have wired to town for more. You see, sir, I am ready to follow out your suggestions conscientiously."

Amoory, whose refined and clever face began to betray signs of the spiritual torment he was suffering, accompanied Jamieson to the gallery, where the housekeeper was waiting.

"Jamieson!" he said, laying his hand on the doctor's shoulder.

"Yes, sir."

"You shall not regret this."

"I hope not," retorted the doctor, bluntly.

"I am not a man who goes back upon my word."

Jamieson followed the housekeeper into the tapestried bedroom, his eyes glancing with critical eagerness at the face upon the pillow. The cheeks were more flushed, the eyes brighter than before, the lips looking like threads of scarlet when contrasted with the black masses of the girl's hair. She smiled as Jamieson crossed the room towards her. Already she had discovered a sense of relief in the presence of this grave-faced man with the determined mouth and the watchful eyes.

"How good of you to come again so soon!"

Jamieson seated himself beside the bed.

"I am so sorry to give you so much trouble."

"Believe me, it is no trouble."

"You have seen Mr. Amoory again?"

"Yes."

"How does he seem?"

"Much worried about you—as is only natural."

She smiled wistfully, and laid her hand on Jamieson's arm.

"You must do your best for me for his sake," she said, simply.

"For your own sake, Miss Grey," he retorted, his strong face flushing curiously before her eyes.

Three days passed. Jamieson of King's Malling made frequent pilgrimages to the white house clustered amid its firs. Anthony Amoory would meet him with an anxious face and a sad courtliness that conquered the younger man's suspicions. Jamieson began to confess to a strong liking for the Assyriologist,

though possibly his mind was biased by sentiments more subtle and saving in their source. They were anxious days for Jamieson and for Amoory—days when the fever ran in flood and the heavy eyes and flushed face, the hurrying pulse and the rapid breath, seemed to threaten ultimate defeat.

It was the morning of the fourth day when Jamieson, pale, and tired about the eyes, came down from the sick-room to find Amoory waiting for him in the hall. The scholar's eyes were turned to the younger man with a species of dog-like appeal. He looked thin and haggard, shrunk about the shoulders. The air of spruce and military well-being was in abeyance, as though the trivial niceties of life had lost their least significance.

"Well, sir; well?"

There was a glint as of triumphant hope in Jamieson's eyes. He appeared composed and confident despite the tired lines about his mouth.

"I think that we shall win," he said.

"Ah!"



"THE SCHOLAR'S EYES WERE TURNED TO THE YOUNGER MAN WITH A SPECIES OF DOG-LIKE APPEAL."

"The temperature is down, and there have been no more rigors. Miss Grey has been sleeping well. The worst seems past."

Amoory's figure seemed to recover its erectness of a sudden. He walked to the window, turned, and strode back again, jingling his keys in his pocket, his moustachios twitching, his step light and almost boyish.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, with peculiar emphasis. "You have done well, Jamieson; I do not know how I shall be able to thank you."

There was silence between them for a moment. Then Amoory, squaring his shoulders, walked to the hall window again and looked out into the garden.

"Jamieson!" he said, curtly, over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"I promised you an explanation."

A strange smile passed over the younger man's face, as though it had been touched by a beam of sunlight.

"Miss Grey has asked me to promise——" he began.

"Hey—what?"

Amoory had swung round with an alert stare.

"That I would ask you no questions."

"No questions!"

"Yes."

"Well, sir; well?"

"I accepted her demand."

"You did?"

"Unconditionally."

The Assyriologist's face betrayed the working within him of some deep emotion. He fingered his chin, looked at Jamieson reflectively under his grizzled brows, and smiled, with a softening of his clean-cut mouth that was almost womanly.

"Jamieson," he said, "that girl has the courage of a Christian martyr. I suppose I must hold you bound by your promise."

"I am content," said the younger man, simply.

"So am I, sir. Nor shall I forget the way that you have trusted me."

It was early in May, with the countryside green with the returning spring, when Vivienne walked once more in her garden amid the fir-woods. Jamieson still persisted that her convalescence was not complete, and Vivienne, despite the ripening colour on her cheeks, was content to humour him in the deception. Anthony Amoory had opened his heart to the younger man's friendship, and offered to teach him many things con-

cerning the dim and distant East. Even the gossips of King's Malling came to hear that young Jamieson was compromising his precious liberty. They scoffed at the suggestion that the doctor drove daily to Firlands for the purpose of being initiated into the mysteries of Assyrian cylinders. Several of his feminine acquaintances had noticed that Jamieson was possessed by a distraught and interesting melancholy. It was stated also that Anthony Amoory's niece was an heiress, and, of course, "young Jamieson" was a man with a future.

Any interested spinster who had been favoured with a glimpse of a corner of the Firlands garden one May evening would have diagnosed the doctor's disease with no great difficulty. Vivienne was lying in a basket-chair under a laburnum, dressed in white linen, a red sash about her waist, and a scarlet cushion under her glossy hair. She had a book in her lap; a gate-legged table, with choice china thereon, was beside her. Jamieson sat facing her on a garden-chair, looking very grave and handsome, his eyes fixed upon Miss Vivienne with a melancholy steadfastness that was remarkably expressive.

The girl shifted the red cushion under her head, and looked dreamily at the evening sky.

"Why do you wish to be told the truth?" she asked, turning the pages of the book mechanically, and smiling enigmatically to herself the while.

Jamieson rested his elbows on his knees.

"I may claim some privilege, may I not?" he said, reverently enough.

"Yes, to be sure."

"Your illness still puzzles me."

"And your professional vanity bridles at the thought?"

"No; not that."

"Well?"

"It is because I believe the secret will teach me to honour you the more."

Vivienne turned her eyes suddenly to Jamieson's face. He was looking at her very earnestly, his strong and nervous hands clasped between his knees. His face betrayed all that was in his heart. No great penetration was needed to fathom the depths of his desire. Vivienne rose up suddenly from her chair, blushing slightly, and putting back her black hair with her hands.

"I think you deserve to be trusted," she said.

"Thank you."

"Come. I will show you the skeleton in the cupboard."

She crossed the garden, entered the house,

she went down the stairway and along the gallery to the western wing. Taking a key from her pocket she unlocked the door of a room at the end of the gallery, passed in, and beckoned

him to follow her.

"Come in," she said.

"What is this?"

"My uncle's room."

"And I am to see him?"

"Yes, if you wish."

"I wish to see him."

"Very good."

"He is waiting for you."

"Thank you very much."

"You are welcome."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

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"Good-bye."

what appeared to be a bacteriological laboratory, lighted by a skylight in the roof. An incubator stood in one corner. The long table was littered with scientific instruments, a microscope, culture tubes, glass jars, and the like. Against one wall stood a bookcase filled with the latest scientific works in all languages. Cases of microscopic slides and specimen bottles were ranged on shelves around the walls.

Jamieson turned to the girl with a puzzled smile.

"Your sanctum?" he asked.

"No; my uncle's."

"Ah!"

She leant against the table, her hands playing with the chain of amethysts that hung down over her bosom.

"My uncle has been a student of bacteriology for years," she said, speaking a little hurriedly and looking in Jamieson's face; "it has been a great secret, known only to a few chosen friends. Mr. Amoory has studied for years on the Continent, and learnt much from Pasteur at Paris. His great work has been the attempt to produce an antitoxin that would react against tetanus. For years I have followed him in his work."

She stopped, drew in her breath, and looked questioningly at Jamieson. An expression of partial bewilderment still possessed the man's face. He stood with his arms folded, regarding the girl with curious intenceness.

"My uncle made many serums," she continued.

"Yes; I understand."

"He worked on Pasteur's lines, and fully believes that he has succeeded. He experimented first upon animals, and then upon himself."

Jamieson's face was very grave.

"Upon himself?"

"Yes. After treatment with his serums he inoculated a wound in his foot

from a strong culture of tetanus bacilli."

"And the result?"

"He escaped unharmed."

She leant her hands upon the table and stood leaning back a little, propping herself upon her arms. There was an expression of great earnestness upon her face, a warm glow of womanly enthusiasm that was utterly heroic.

"I think it is a noble work," she said, "to strive to save one's fellows from the grip of some terrible disease."

Jamieson bowed his head in acquiescence.

"My uncle wished for a further experiment."

"Yes."

"To test his conclusions."

"I understand."

"I offered myself."

"You!"

"Yes. He would not hear of it at first, but at last I succeeded in persuading him. That was the beginning of my illness."

Jamieson stood looking at her with a species of wondering homage. Her courage seemed to hold itself in no vain conceit, and her divine modesty was an example to the gods. To Jamieson her youth and beauty seemed to cry out against so hazardous a sacrifice. Was such nobleness to be crucified in such a cause?

"Well?" he said, quietly.

She roused herself and continued.

"My uncle made what he called 'a gross and criminal blunder.'"

"Ah!"

"I was to be protected with his serums previous to inoculation."

"Yes."

"His serums had become contaminated."

"Contaminated?"

"After the first two injections I became very feverish. He examined the serum under the microscope, and found that he had injected a culture of cocci into my blood."

She halted, looked up at Jamieson, and smiled. He was leaning forward slightly with an expression of devout dread upon his face, realizing, as he did, the peril that she had tempted.

"Now you understand?"

Almost instinctively he bowed to her, as though the knightly spirit of pure manhood in him constrained him to the homage.

"I understand," he said, slowly.

"You were very good and patient with me."

"Thank you."

"Had I died, my uncle would have confessed everything. The shame of it would have killed him."

She gave a low, tremulous laugh, moved away from the table, and half turned to

look at the books in the great bookcase. Jamieson, his face like the face of a fanatic, started towards her and stretched out his right hand.

"Vivienne!"

She turned again, looking almost frightened, and stood with her hands over her heart.

"Yes," she said.

"Promise me——"

"What shall I promise you?"

"That you will never risk your life again. Heavens! It would be sacrilege. You will promise me this?"

She gave a shy and tremulous little laugh,



colouring, and holding herself somewhat aloof from him.

"I suppose I must make you the promise," she said.

"I claim it—yes; and I would ask more."

And, since he had saved her life, who was better fitted to cherish it than young Jamieson of King's Malling?

OUR SHORT STORY.

A MATTER OF MONEY.

By WARWICK DREEPING.

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It was raining the heavy, wind-driven rain of a March day, and from the white cottage on the high road above Swaynsford village two men with sacks over their shoulders were carrying furniture down the box-edged path to a cart outside the gate. A small crowd of children watched the process with solemn curiosity, oblivious to the slopping rain, the puddles, and the mud.

The two men banged an oak-chest over the tailboard of the cart and looked at each other as though not sorry the work was at an end.

"That's the lot, Frank, ain't it?"

"I reckon so. Git back, will yer?" and he swung himself up to the front of the cart.

Within the cottage a tall girl of twenty was walking to and fro over the brick floor of the kitchen. She looked straight and clean, fresh in the face, angry and resentful about the eyes. The little place had been almost stripped of its belongings. Only a table, two chairs, a few pots and pans, cheap ornaments and crockery remained.

Before the open grate an old woman rocked to and fro on a three-legged stool, her hands to her head, a darned shawl over her shoulders. She made a dismal whimpering as she swayed to and fro, the stoop of her back rounded with hopeless humiliation.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! what will the folks say of us? Have they gone, Crissy? Are they giving 't leave us the chairs?"

"They've gone, mother."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! they've taken the mangle, too. Dear Lord, what are we to live by? It be terrible. Mr. Smith might have given me a chance."

"He's a brute, mother."

"It ain't Christian of him, and he a deacon, too."

"We'll come through, mother; don't you doubt it."

"The Lord help us! If only Tom Hatherly were here."

"Tom?"

"Yes, my dear. He wouldn't have stood by and seen us beggared. But there, there, he be a big man now, I guess. He's forgot us. This there war be a terrible affliction."

"He spoke of his regiment coming home," she said.

"Three months ago, my dear, and not another letter to ye. The lad's plenty of girls to pick from, and him a soldier. Oh, dear! oh, dear! life be hard when the money's tight."

"Don't you fret, mother. I haven't the heart to think that the old home's going from you. We're not done with yet."

Night came, and with it a few handfuls of sticks thrown on the fire under the great chimney. The cheap cotton curtains were drawn across the casement, the paraffin lamp lit, but no cloth spread on the kitchen table.

"Come, mother, supper's ready."

The invitation was more liberal than the food upon the table. Two cold potatoes, a piece of cheese, some cocoa, and a hunch of bread.

"Oh, dear, child, I can't touch the stuff."

Criss coaxed her, the firelight making her face look warm and tender.

"Come, now, come, just to please a girl."

"I ain't no heart for it, child."

"A cup of cocoa and some bread and cheese. You won't sleep, mother; just eat a bit for my sake."

Criss was clearing the table when they heard the garden gate open, and footsteps came slowly up the path. Someone knocked at the cottage door. Mother and daughter looked at each other dumbly. They had suffered so much in a single day that they shivered at the thought of further torture.

"Who's there?"

A man's voice answered them.

"Only Mr. Willing."

"Good evening, ladies," and the baker crossed

the threshold. He was a dapper man with an acute thin face, genteel in manners, and thirty as to age. Criss Flemming had never flattered Mr. Willing with encouragement, even though he had long honoured her with his most prosperous attentions.

Mrs. Flemming held up her hands.

"Dear Lord, sir, you've caught us in a shameful pickle. Only a wooden chair for a friend! Who would have dreamt it!"

The baker stared round him with an air of dramatic surprise. Two chairs and a table made no great show in the cottage kitchen.

"Why, what's this; refurnishing, eh?"

He looked at Criss and saw her bite her lip. The old lady took up the lament.

"Oh, dear Lord, Mr. Willing, Mr. Smith has dropped on us and taken all my choice stuff—the oak-chest and the clock and the old Sheraty desk my husband had. All gone for a matter of a few blessed pounds."

"What! Don't tell me, ma'am, that Mr. Smith has sent the bailiffs in?"

"It's true," and the girl reddened at the shame of it.

"You do astonish me. A prosperous man like Mr. Smith! And a deacon, too. Are you sure, Criss, there's no mistake?"

"Does it look like a mistake?" and she seemed ready to weep.

"What does Mr. Smith claim against you?"

"A matter of fifteen pounds."

"Fifteen pounds!" and the baker rubbed his hands and frowned.

"Yes, we've had a lot of stuff from him, and what with bad luck, and me being ill, and Miss Tinsley dying, who gave us all her needlework and washing, we've been getting low."

Mr. Willing rose suddenly, and stood looking sheepishly at the two women.

"Something must be done," he observed, with a side glance at the daughter.

The widow clutched at the vague suggestion, feeling disturbed as to the reason of Mr. Willing's departure.

"I'm sure, sir, we're in terrible trouble. We've been respectable folk, and it's hard to be sold up."

"Indeed, ma'am, you have my sympathy."

"There's my girl there; it ain't pleasant for her to have all the neighbours peering and slobbering."

"Criss and I might have a talk," and he made a gontool gesture with his hat towards the door; "it's a fine night—now."

Mrs. Flemming beheld new possibilities.

"Have a talk with Criss, Mr. Willing," she said; "young heads are better than old 'uns, I suppose."

Mr. Willing removed the meeting to the garden gate, looking sleek and complacent, like a man who warns to generous impulses. The girl stood beside him, gazing out in silence over the sombre and wind-swept woods, her instinct warning her what might be coming.

The baker glanced up sentimentally at the stars.

"I'm very sorry, Criss," he said. She sighed and did not answer him.

"You know, I'm a friend. I can't see you suffering this way; it goes to a man's heart."

His eyes insinuated many truths, and he tried to take her hand.

"Haven't you a kind word for me, Criss?"

"I don't know," and she stiffened against the attack.

"I'm not a bad sort of man, eh, and I haven't looked at another girl since you came nineteen. Supposing I take this business on my shoulders and see your mother comfortable for life?"

He stooped towards her, his hand touching her arm.

"Just think," he said, "whether there is a man that can do better by you than Ernest Willing."

"You mean you are wanting to marry me," she said with a kind of sullen self-restraint.

"I do, I love you, Criss."

"Well?"

"I'll make you happy, and your mother shan't want in her old age. That's fair and straight in English, eh?"

"It's fair enough," she confessed.

"Will you have me, Criss?"

"I'll think on it."

"But you know?"

"I'll think on it. Give me a night or two. I've had so much on me to-day," and she turned and left him standing at the gate.

Now, Mr. Ernest Willing was a very cocky little person, and the village folk inferred from

THE NURSING MOTHERS' FOOD

ROBINSON'S PATENT GROATS

THE BABY WILL DO WELL ON

ROBINSON'S PATENT BARLEY

the supreme sprightliness of his bearing that Mr. Willing's fortunes were in flower. All that week he threw out jaunty and complacent hints, remarking that someone would be wearing a ring before long, and that he contemplated buying a pony and trap to suit a lady. The finger of gossip was pointed at Mrs. Flemming's cottage. Somehow Mr. Willing's generosity had been noised abroad and vastly exaggerated. He had bought Mrs. Flemming's cottage, so folks said, and had settled it on her for life. As for the baker, he knew that he was sullenly envied by half the young fellows in the village. Not a comelier face could be shown in the village than Criss Flemming's, and she was tall and straight as a well-grown cypress.

They were restless and unhappy days for the girl herself. Her mother had set her heart on the scheme and was for ever hymning in Mr. Willing's praise. What a head he had for business, what affable manners, what a kind and sympathetic way with him. Lucky would the girl be who won such a steady and prosperous husband, a young man whose ability had set him above the rough and tumble farming fellows who thought of nothing but their cabbage gardens and a gossip in the local pub. Criss Flemming was thinking all the while of Corporal Hatherly, sturdy Tom of her girl's pride, who had thrashed one of the blacksmith's men in the meadow behind the forge because the fellow had spoken slightly of her. The thought of marrying Ernest Willing frightened her, even though she recognized the man's good points. The alliance would insure her mother against sordid care, and no doubt the village women would envy her the match.

Mr. Willing stood at the garden gate one evening with his arm about Criss Flemming's waist.

"I'm a lucky man," he said complacently, as though it was generous of him to blink his own superior merits.

The girl hated herself for her sense of hypocrisy, but she had felt lonely and miserable, the victim of her mother's poverty.

"You have been very kind," she confessed.

"And what about the day, eh?"

"What day?"

Mr. Willing sniggered, oblivious to the fact that the girl revolted from him.

"The day for the bell ringing. You must know; part of a lady's business."

"Next August."

"August! Can't be done. Say June, my dear."

"Well, let it be June," and she tried for

her mother's sake not to betray her bitterness to him.

Criss Flemming's wedding dress was in the widow's hands, but the girl had no joy of the white silk and the lace. Mr. Willing had given her the money for the dress, and perhaps she hated it the more for that. There was mild enthusiasm among the neighbours. The women congratulated her, their blessings spiced with a dash of envy. Mr. Willing beamed behind his counter. Business was prosperous, and he felt the one man of the moment. Criss looked handsome in her new summer clothes. The baker had been generous, though it was mainly a matter of vanity with him to let people see that he was to marry a pretty wife. It struck him at times that the girl seemed sullen and a little sad, but Mr. Willing's conceit disposed of the objection. Many women were moody and silent before marriage. No doubt Criss was taking her responsibility to heart, the responsibility of making—him—happy.

June came with the grass deep in the meadows and wild roses in the hedgerows. It was one Tuesday evening when a sturdy, brown-faced man in khaki climbed out of the train at Aylsham Junction, and taking his kit bag under his arm marched off briskly through the town. To Corporal Hatherly the green fields and hedgerows were sweet with the sweetness of an English June. His brown face beamed as he swung along the road, with the twilight deepening as the scarlet of the sunset turned to gold.

Nearing Sweynsford village, straggling up the valley amid its woods, he took the path across the fields, climbing many a stile where he and Criss Flemming had lithered as boy and girl. There was something sacred to this strong, war-tanned man in the peace of the place and in the memories that met him at every meadow. He was wondering whether the girl had changed much in two years, whether she would be coy with him, half like a stranger. Corporal Hatherly met no one on a straggling path that evening. He reached the meadow high road without seeing the face of a friend.

There, nearly opposite the stile and backed by a larch wood, stood the Flemmings' cottage. Its white walls turned towards the sunset. The roses were in bloom over the wooden porch, the sweetpeas a-flutter in the little garden. Tom Hatherly saw that a light was burning in the kitchen. He opened the gate noiselessly, stole up the path, and looked in through the leaded casement.

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By the table sat Criss Flemming's mother with a mass of white gauzy stuff across her knees. She was sewing busily, with her head bowed down, though Corporal Hatherly did not realize the meaning of her work.

He knocked, lifted the latch, and stepped into the kitchen, to see the widow's face turned sharply towards him.

"I've come back again."

Mrs. Flemming gave a queer cry, dropped her work, and stared at the figure in khaki by the door.

"Tom—why, Tom?"

He put his kit bag down, crossed the room, and bent as though to kiss her.

"It's good to be back in the old place, mother."

Mrs. Flemming blinked at him and held up a hand.

"Tom Hatherly!"

"There, I came in too sudden, eh? How's Criss?" and he looked round the familiar room and smiled.

The widow strove to recover her composure. She picked up her work, but her hands trembled.

"Criss be very well, Tom."

Her tone startled him.

"I'm glad. Is she in?"

"No, she be out at Aylsham, shopping."

The soldier's eyes had fixed themselves curiously on the white dress across the old lady's knee. He had a shrinking suspicion that he was not welcome, and that Mrs. Flemming had not told him all the news.

"That's a fine gown you're making."

"Yes, it be for Criss."

"Criss!"

"Yes, her wedding dress."

Tom Hatherly stood to attention with a sharp stiffening of the back and neck.

"Criss' wedding dress?"

"To be sure."

"And who's the girl to marry?"

"Why, Ernest Willing, Tom, of course. But there, you ain't heard nothing of it. You foreign folk are late with the news."

Tom Hatherly looked at the white silk, his face almost the colour of Criss' dress. Mrs. Flemming's needle worked with irritable briskness. She was inclined to quarrel with the corporal's return.

"I reckon, then," and he gulped down his humiliation. "I reckon I'm not wanted much in your kitchen, Mrs. Flemming."

"Why, Tom, what's amiss with it?"

He turned aside, opening and shutting his

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brown hands and staring at the kit bag he had left by the cottage door.

"Is the girl happy?"

Mrs. Flemming's face simulated surprise.

"Ernest Willing will make her a good husband. He's a clever fellow and has a tidy bit of money."

The soldier muttered something and turned to the door.

"Out of sight, out of mind," he said bitterly. "I'll go up to Peter Mason's to get a bed. Tell Criss I hope she'll be happy."

Mrs. Flemming gave a relieved look at his broad shoulders as they vanished through the door.

"She'll be pleased to see you, Tom, some day soon," she called after him; "we're that busy we don't know which way to turn."

Corporal Hatherly went out to the darkening road like a man whose outlook upon life had been changed in the course of an hour. There was no little bitterness in the blow to him, a young fellow who had fought back many a temptation for the thought of a girl in an English village. He supposed that it had been a mere April fancy with Criss Flemming. She was young, and he could not blame her. But he hated the smug and genteel Mr. Willing from the very bottom of his sturdy heart.

The soldier stopped at the stile where the path opened across the fields. He dropped his bag in the grass, climbed up, and perched himself on the top rail like a man who was tired. Two young labourers went by in the dusk and gave him good night, without recognizing him as a friend. Corporal Hatherly felt that the times had changed. A sense of isolation, of loneliness, made him wish that he had not come.

Sitting with his head between his hands he heard a footstep on the path behind him, and drew aside to let a woman pass. Her foot was on the step before he recognized her. It was Criss Flemming, Mr. Willing's prospective wife.

"Criss!"

She gave a sharp, startled cry, and stood looking at him over the stile. Corporal Hatherly's knees shook under him. He had not been prepared for so abrupt a meeting.

"Tom, is it you?"

"Me, sure enough."

"Have you seen mother?"

"Yes," and he hung his head.

"She's told you?"

"I saw the dress."

Criss Flemming looked at the man and saw the dejected drooping of his shoulders. Her own heart was hurrying as though she had been frightened by a begging tramp in the dusk. All the old memories were awake within her.

"Tom, what are you thinking of me?"

"I'm hoping you may be happy, Criss."

"Oh—Tom, I couldn't help myself. Mother was being sold up, and Ernest, well—he paid the money."

Corporal Hatherly's figure straightened.

"What's that? Sold up?"

"Yes, by old Smith; we owed the bard man money and he took our stuff. Ernest was kind to us—and I thought—"

She broke down of a sudden and began to sob. Tom Hatherly was over the stile like a young colt. He put his arm round her, and she did not hinder him.

"There, Criss—girl, don't you take on. You should have written. I had the money on me, and I'd have done as well by you as Willing. And you're to marry him. I reckon I can't count."

"You did not write to me, Tom."

"I was ill," he answered.

"Oh!" and her bitterness increased. "I had known. Why—?"

She hesitated, for his arm had tightened about her, and he was listening, his face pale and determined in the dusk of the night.

"Someone's coming."

"Where?"

"Over the fields. Stand back here. They'll go by in the dark."

Beside the stile stood a thick hedge that closed the garden of a deserted cottage. There was a gap where the gate had been. Tom Hatherly drew the girl through the gap, darted for his bag, and returned to cover.

Two men were coming along the path, their voices audible to the pair hiding in the garden. Criss stiffened and held Tom Hatherly's hand.

She recognized Mr. Willing's complacent tenor.

"Ha—ha—ha," it was an old man's laugh, harsh and half suppressed.

"What they call 'diplomacy,' Mr. Smith, eh?"

"A good joke, sir; faint heart never won fair lady. Fifteen pounds for a wife."

"Well, it was a bargain, Willing, and one of the funniest bargains a man ever asked me to make. I seized the old lady's furniture all right, eh, and then you stepped in like a hero, saved the home, and had the young damsel falling on your breast. I've often had a chuckle over the trick. I suppose I may attend at the wedding?"

"We're sending you a card, sir," and both men tittered.

Behind the hedge Tom Hatherly was holding Criss Flemming's hand. They stood very close to each other in the dark. The soldier felt the girl's fingers contract on his, heard her hold her breath as Mr. Willing followed the deacon over the stile.

"Did you hear that, Tom?"

"I did," quoth the soldier grimly.

"Look; he's going to the cottage, the little fox."

"Wait a while, Criss," and his arm went round her with a more vigorous suggestion of possession.

They saw Mr. Willing's figure outlined against the window, and heard him call to Mrs. Flemming in the kitchen. Doubtless the old lady told him that he might meet her daughter in the meadows, for the baker turned and came back towards the stile. Deacon Smith had gone down the hill towards the village. The diplomat was alone under the wink of the all-wise stars.

"Bide here, Criss," and Corporal Hatherly pressed her arm.

"What are you going to do, Tom?"

"Just talk a little," and he smiled and caught the approval on her face.

Mr. Willing was over the stile when he drew up with a jerk, to find a man closing the path across the fields.

"Good evening, sir. I hope you're well?"

The baker's lip dropped; the nature of the interference scared him.

"What d'you want?" he asked. "Who is it?"

"You call to mind Tom Hatherly?"

"Hatherly! Who's he?"

The corporal's brown face beamed with exultant griminess.

"Don't you try bluff, Mr. Ernest Willing," he said; "you know me, sir, and I know you. What about Deacon Smith taking Mrs. Flemming's furniture?"

The baker bristled and made as though to pass.

"You mind your own business," he began.

"I'll mind it, and yours. Who tried to buy a wife for fifteen pounds?"

"Confound you, what d'you mean?"

The soldier laughed.

"Mr. Smith was an obliging friend," he said sarcastically; "he forced the game for you by taking Mrs. Flemming's stuff."

"You lie."

"Lie, do! I reckon I don't."

Mr. Willing gave a scared glance at the militant figure and made a step towards the stile. The corporal's arms swung up from his square shoulders.

"Will you take it standing?"

"Keep off, you blackguard."

"Come, up with them."

"Touch me and I'll have the law on you," came the indignant squeal.

A pair of brown fists came thudding about Mr. Willing's head. He ducked, dodged, beat the air, and went down panting and whimpering on the grass. Corporal Hatherly stood over him, seeing that the diplomat would not fight.

"Don't hurt the poor thing, Tom."

Mr. Willing sat up with sudden adroitness, to find Criss Flemming at the soldier's side.

"Don't hurt the coward."

"Coward!" and the baker scrambled to his feet.

A curious laugh came from the lips of his contemptuous bride.

"So you paid fifteen pounds for me, Ernest Willing," she said.

"It's a lie, an infernal lie."

"Now that's good, Tom, ain't it? Didn't we hear it from Mr. Smith's own lips?"

The diplomat glanced from one to the other, and made a brave effort to enlarge his shrunken pride.

"I'll not argue the question," he said, dabbing a bleeding nose.

The scornful ones laughed.

"I reckon I owe you fifteen pounds, sir," said Corporal Hatherly, striking his pocket.

But Mr. Ernest Willing had disappeared over the stile.

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THE MARK OF THE BRANDING IRON



By WARWICK DEEPING

A BOY came running up through the sea-gate of Winchelsea town. He had news to tell, and felt important over it, and he shouted at old Boatswain Mengs, who sat on the seat by the wall and was knocking the ash from his pipe by tapping it against his wooden leg.

"Samson has come home," he shouted.

"The devil he has, has he!" said the boatswain.

And the boy ran on.

He shouted the news to various people whom he passed, and last of all he shouted it to a girl who put her head out of the upper window of a little old red-tiled house.

"Samson has come home."

He was not a very bright boy, and he did not see that the news mattered to the girl leaning out of the window.

"Which Samson?"

"Why, Big Samson."

"Richard Samson?"

"No; Big Samson, Big Dave Samson."

The girl's face fell, and her lower lip quivered a little.

"When did he come back?"

"A Newhaven boat put him down at Rye this morning. I saw him outside the church talking to Captain Bell and Exciseman Stephens, and a crowd of sailors."

The boy ran on, and the girl closed the window. Her eyes looked troubled, and a little frightened. She went down into the front parlour, where a thin old lady with a face like a bird's sat knitting at the open window.

The old lady was rather deaf.

"What was that boy saying, Susan?"

The girl bent close to the old lady.

"David Samson has come home, mother."

"Lord bless me, I thought he and Dick were taken in the *Warspite*."

"So they were, mother."

"Then the Frenchies have let him go——"

"Perhaps he escaped."

"Where's Dick, then?"

The girl gave a sort of helpless shrug of the shoulders.

"How should I know, mother! He may be dead."

There was fruit to be picked in the garden behind the house, and Susan Emery spent the afternoon among the currant bushes, staining her fingers with the juice of black currants. She was a slightly built girl, dark-haired, pale, with shy eyes that always seemed full of thought, and this afternoon those eyes of hers were restless and afraid.

Susan was setting supper in the parlour when she heard men shouting, and the sound of a great many people coming up the street. She went to the window, and hiding behind one of the chintz curtains, saw a crowd of men and boys appear round the white house that stood at the corner. In the thick of the crowd walked Dave Samson, rolling his great shoulders as he walked, his sailor's hat on the back of his head, his big red hands ready to be shaken by anyone who felt so minded. Someone in Rye had given him a blue coat with brass buttons, and he had a sprig of lavender in his buttonhole.

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Dave Samson!"

"Good old Dave!"

It was a great home-coming, and David Samson enjoyed it. To Susan, hiding behind the curtain, he looked bigger and breezier and more arrogant than ever.

She started back into a corner of the room, for Dave Samson had stopped in the middle of the road. People had been kind to him at Rye, and he was in a state of exaltation.

He took off his hat and waved it.

"Three cheers, lads, for the prettiest girl in old England. Hurrah, hurrah!"

The crowd cheered. Susan slipped away along the wall towards the door leading into the kitchen.

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"Susan, black-eyed Susan. Here's Dave Samson come home. Open the window and throw him a kiss, my dear."

But the window remained closed, for Susan had fled out into the garden, and hidden herself in the arbour that was covered with ivy.

Dave Samson and the crowd went on. The inn up above, fronting the churchyard, received them, for Dave had his adventures to tell, and everyone wanted to drink with him.

Dusk had fallen; old Mrs. Emery had gone to bed, and Susan was clearing away the supper things when she heard heavy footsteps coming along the brick-paved path. Someone knocked at the door, and she guessed that it was David Samson.

She had locked the door, and she did not mean to open it.

"Who's there?"

"Why, Susan, girl, it's Dave, surely!"

She went to the window, and opened the lattice, knowing in her heart that the man would have to be faced and met.

"David, is it you!"

He came along to the window, and she could see that he had been drinking.

"Why, bless me, shy as ever. Give a man a kiss, Susan, dear."

She drew back a little.

"Mother's gone to bed, David, and I've got the supper things to wash. How glad you must be to be home; and how did you get away from the French?"

He leant his arms on the window-sill.

"I was too sharp and too big for the Frenchies. They put us in a hulk at Brest, and I broke loose one night, knocked two Froggies over the head, jumped for it, and swam. I picked up a boat at the stern of a brig, and rowed out to sea, right into a fog. The Lord was with me, Susan. Bless me, if an English two-decker didn't come along in the morning, pick me up, and land me at Plymouth."

She did not want to hear about his adventures, and she wished him anywhere but where he was, but there were questions that the woman in her felt driven to ask.

"What has become of Dick, David?"

She saw him frown.

"Dick! Why, poor old cousin Dick is there in the hulks, and twenty more of the *Warspite's* men with him. I wanted

them to break away with me, but they hadn't the pluck to do it. Dick isn't what he was."

She bit her lower lip to keep control of herself.

"He isn't ill, David?"

The big man heaved his shoulders and stared at her solemnly.

"He's had scurvy. He's been very bad, Susan."

She said nothing.

"I don't think poor old Dick will ever come alive out of that hulk at Brest."

She was blind for the moment, and her knees seemed ready to give way under her. But she strove with herself, conscious of Dave's great lowering face and the way he stared at her in the dark.

"You were always very soft on Dick, Susan."

"Dick was always very good to me and mother."

"I'm thinking he never was the man for you, Susan."

She hated him for those words, but her instinctive fear of him was greater than her hate.

"That's as it may be, David. I'll wish you good-night."

She made as though to close the lattice, but Dave Samson kept his elbow in the way.

"Give me a kiss, my dear, just to show you are glad to see me home again."

"I can't, David, I can't."

He thrust his arm into the room and made a sudden snatch at her wrist, but she started back, and he missed her.

Then he burst into half drunken laughter, and took off his hat with mock ceremony.

"I shall have to learn ye, Susan, not to be shy and proud. No more sea for me, my dear. Dave Samson's going to settle down at home, and marry."

And he lurched off down the street.

Susan went to bed, thinking of that French prison ship at Brest, and of Richard Samson lying in irons there, and dying slowly of scurvy.

* * * *

In the ^{hulk}old of that French hulk at Brest some thirty men sat ranged with their backs against the timber walls of their prison. They were in irons, these men, so many shadowy and motionless figures, very sullen and grim. A horn lantern swung from a beam, and the place

The Mark of the Branding Iron

smelt foul and musty. Now and again a door opened, and a sentry thrust his head in, and looked round at the silent men.

A boy in a far corner began to whimper and to talk nonsense like one in a fever. The men listened, silently, helplessly. Someone jangled his irons, and began to curse in a low and monotonous voice. A man, whose face was lit dimly by the light of the lantern, raised his head, and looked across to where the boy was lying.

"I can't stand this, mates. We shall all be gibbering soon like the lad over there. He's dying. Why don't these devils send a doctor!"

Several voices began to growl.

"What can you do, Dick?"

"We might have had a chance but for that cousin of yours."

"Curse him. We branded him all right. But now they've put us in irons."

Richard Samson, who sat under the lantern, stared hard at the opposite wall.

"I am going to break out of this, mates, or die. I am going after the man who gave our game away."

The growling voices grew fiercer.

"Aye, aye, I'm with ye there, Dick."

"And so am I."

"He got off—by betraying his mates! I'll beat every port in the kingdom—if I ever get home—till I find Dave Samson, and then——"

Richard sat up suddenly, and leaning forward, spoke in a half whisper.

"Who's game—for another try?"

"What about these blasted irons!"

"Mates, I've got a file."

"A file!"

"How did you hide it, Dick?"

"Never you mind, I've got it. I shall be fit for Bedlam in a week if I don't do something. It's going to be sink or swim with me."

They bent as near each other as they could, and began to talk in whispers, one man keeping his eyes fixed on the door.

* * * * *

Susan Emery dreamt that night that she saw men throw something wrapped in a sheet over the side of a ship. The thing fell with a splash into the sea, and she knew, as one knows in a dream, that it was Richard Samson who was sewn up in that sheet. And she awoke, shivering, and fancying that she had heard Richard's voice calling to her.

"Susan! Susan!"

She could not put that dream out of her thoughts. It haunted her more vividly day after day, till she believed that it had been more than a dream. She felt sure that Dick was dead.

Dave had given up his sea life, and had joined old Uncle Samson on his farm. Susan wished him at sea, for she had a horror of Dave, perhaps because she knew that the man had a strange power over her. She could remember when he and Dick were boys they had quarrelled and fought because of her, and Dave had thrashed Dick savagely, for Dave had always been cruelly strong. But when they had grown to be men Dick had turned the tables on his big cousin. Susan never knew how it had come about, but Dick had put the fear of God in Dave's heart, yet Susan had never lost her fear of him.

She had always felt that if anything happened to Dick, Dave would frighten her into marrying him. It was just physical mastery, a brutal, dominating purposefulness that made her feel helpless and afraid.

And now he was so near, and she believed that Dick was dead.

Dave Samson was not diffident or dila-tory. He appeared to know what he wanted, and to be obstinately bent in winning what he desired. He trudged up every evening after the day's work on his father's farm, and would rap with his knuckles on the parlour window, and come in at the door if no one answered him. At first Susan had kept the front door bolted, but Dave had scrambled over the garden wall at the back and caught her in the kitchen.

"Don't you bolt the door on me, Susan," he had said; "I am not the man to stand that from you. See?"

Her mother, too, was more of an enemy than a friend.

"Bless the girl, one man's just like another when you've been married to him for a month! And Dave will have the farm. Don't you be for forgetting that, Susan."

Susan had always been a sensitive soul, and she had no one to whom she could speak of these things. Moreover, she had a feeling that the matter lay between Dave Samson and herself, and that no one could help her, and that no one could interfere.

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Dave was kind in his way, but she knew that he would grow rough and threatening directly she tried to keep him at a distance.

She was coming back across the fields one evening after spending the afternoon at Udimore, and this field path ran along the boundary of Uncle Samson's farm. She hurried along for fear Dave should be about, but she might have spared herself her hurrying, for he was there waiting for her under the shade of a big hawthorn hedge. He had put on his Sunday clothes, and his shoes with the silver buckles; and his clean white neckerchief made his heavy round face look redder and more staring.

"Hallo, my dear!"

He sprang out at her and caught her by the arm.

"Oh, Dave!"

Her white face and her scared eyes did not flatter him, and he knew it.

"What! Am I going to eat ye? I knew you would come this way, Susan. There's no getting away from Dave Samson. Now just you take my arm."

She obeyed him because there seemed nothing else for her to do. His eyes were watching her all the while, and though they smiled they were cruel.

"There's something we have got to talk about, Susan."

"Is there, Dave?"

"Now, don't pretend, Miss Sly. When are you and me going to get married?"

She drew in her breath and held it, and she could feel her heart beating in a panic.

"I don't see how I can marry ye, David."

"Don't you! I do."

She tried to draw her arm away, but he would not let it go. Then she felt desperate.

"I can't marry you, David."

"Eh—and why not?"

"Because I love—Dick."

She dared not look at him, and she was surprised at the quietness with which he answered her.

"That's just the one big reason why I am going to marry you, Susan."

"Oh, David, I—"

"Do you think I love Dick? Not I. He may be dead, or he may be alive, but you are going to be my wife. I love you

—more than he ever did, Susan, just because I hate him—like poison."

He put his arm round her and crushed her against his side.

"It was always 'Dick this and Dick that.' Hang him, I say! I am going to marry you, Susan, do you see!"

She felt helpless, stifled.

"I—I—can't."

His voice grew threatening.

"You will, my dear, and I'll fix the day for you: this day next month, see. Father will be glad to have you in the house. I'm master there now. So you go home and get all your pretty clothes ready. I'm going to Parson Steel to-night to have the banns put up."

"I can't marry you, David. I can't marry any man."

He caught her chin with his great hand and twisted her face round to his.

"You will marry me, my dear, so make up your mind to it. You listen to me."

Susan closed her eyes, and the shame of all that he said to her sank into her soul. She felt helpless, stunned. And she knew that he would do what he threatened to do—if she did not surrender.

"So you'll marry me, d'you see!"

Her lips quivered and her eyes remained closed.

"Yes, David; I will marry you."

It was as though he had cast the spell of a great terror over her. The days went by, and she could not escape from it, for Dave walked into Winchelsea town each evening, and each time she saw him her strange sense of subjection seemed to increase. He had begun to kiss her now and to touch her with his great big hands; and though she shuddered at first, a gradual insensibility stole over her. She seemed to be losing her real self, to be sinking into a kind of torpor.

Their banns were being called; little Miss Biggs, the dressmaker, was busy; all Winchelsea knew that Susan Emery and Dave Samson were to be married.

The days slipped by, and the eve of her marriage day arrived. She sat in her bed with the candle burning beside her and stared at the white dress spread out over a chair. She kept telling herself that it was her wedding dress, and that she was to be married on the morrow, but all emotion seemed asleep in her.

The Mark of the Branding Iron

Now, that very night a trading brig coming up the Channel with a south-west wind stood in towards Rye harbour, and, slackening sail, dropped a boat over her side. A dozen men swarmed down into the boat, oars flashed in the early light, and the boat ran straight for the shore. Men stood up in the stern sheets and cheered and waved their hats to the loiterers on the quay.

There were shouts from the quay as

"Who is he marrying, John Ban-nister?"

"Why, little Susan Emery."

Dick stood speechless for a moment. Then he threw up his hands and shouted to the men who had come ashore with him:

"Saul Eldridge, Jack Crowhurst—mates all! Stand by me, I say. Dave Samson's to be married at noon to the girl who was my sweetheart."



"Seven ragged, grim-faced men came storming between the gravestones"

the boat drew alongside. Fishermen and sailors came running together. They crowded by the landing-steps, cheering and stretching out rough hands.

"Why, mates—good mates—welcome home!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Here's Dick Samson, and Saul Eldridge, and Jack Crowhurst!"

"Why, Dick mate, your Cousin Dave's being married at noon to-day over at Winchelsea."

Dick Samson caught the speaker by the shoulder and looked into his face.

No one on Winchelsea hill saw those seven men running along the flat and dusty road between Rye and Winchelsea towns. Gaunt, half-starved, ragged, some with fever still on them, they ran like grim hounds, and there was no sound save the sound of their padding feet. Dick Samson and two others had no shoes; Saul Eldridge's trousers ended in a ragged fringe at the knees. Hardly a word was spoken as they ran.

Mrs. Emery's cottage was not more than a hundred yards from the church, and Susan was to walk to her wedding,

Cassell's Magazine of Fiction

Dave Samson to meet her at the east gate of the churchyard. All that morning Susan was like one half asleep. Miss Biggs and her friends came to dress her, and she spoke hardly a word, but left herself listlessly in their hands.

Dave Samson was waiting in the churchyard by the gate in the east wall. He wore a new beaver hat, a black broadcloth coat, a green waistcoat with silver chain and seals, and white breeches. His groomsmen stood beside him—a young farmer, with staring blue eyes and sandy whiskers.

Susan had reached the gate, and though she did not look at Dave, she knew that he was there.

He stood forward, smirking, and was about to give her his arm, nodding familiarly to old Stephen Emery, who was to give his niece away.

"I'll do the marching in, Mr. Stephen. Susan's quite happy with me."

There was some shouting away down the street, but no one gave any heed to it. The people gathered in the churchyard did not see seven ragged sailors come tumbling over the wall. The wedding party had nearly reached the porch.

"Out of the way, neighbours; out of the way."

The people fell back, staring, as seven ragged, grim-faced men came storming between the gravestones.

"It's Dick—Dick Samson!" someone cried out.

They saw Dave Samson turn, for Susan had snatched her hand away, and was leaning against the ruined wall of the old church. The wedding party halted, like sheep huddling in a lane.

Dick Samson and the sailors made a rush for the bridegroom.

"Hallo—you cur—you traitor!"

They were on him, and at the last moment he put up his fists and rushed to meet Richard Samson. But Dave, despite his strength, had no chance with those grim men. He cursed, and kicked, and struck at them with his fists; but they smothered him and had him helpless.

Some of the onlookers seemed tempted to interfere, and Saul Eldridge turned and shouted at them:

"Stand off, mates. We'll show you what sort of man Dave Samson is."

Then those who watched saw fierce justice meted out. The sailors dragged

Dave into the open, tore his coat from his back, stripped off his waistcoat, and rent his shirt to tatters.

"Up with him; hoist the traitor up!"

They lifted him on to a flat-topped tomb, and held him there, stripped to the waist. And Saul Eldridge pointed at him with a long, lean forefinger, shouting to all those gathered in the churchyard:

"Neighbours, look at the man who betrayed his mates and sold them to the French when they had made a plan to break prison. We branded him for it. See! Dave Samson will never strip again to fight a warship's guns."

All eyes were fixed on David Samson, and upon his chest was a great red scar. The men whom he had betrayed had branded a letter of shame upon his chest before the Frenchmen had set him free.

A great silence held. Then Richard Samson spoke:

"He betrayed us, this cousin of mine; and he wanted to cheat me of my wife. What say you, neighbours: shall such a cur have the run of our streets?"

A rush was made for the man on the tomb, women and boys joining the men. Dave Samson was thrown down. Someone shouted to him: "Run, you cur—run!"

And run he did, hunted by all the good people of Winchelsea. Stones, sticks, and even rough boots, helped him upon his way.

Susan had fled home, and was lying face downwards on the little chintz-covered couch in the parlour. She was weeping bitterly, and thus Dick found her.

He bent over her and touched her hair. "Susan."

She would not look at him.

"Dick, what must you think of me? I—I thought you were dead."

"There, girl, there."

"And Dave—Dave frightened me. He swore he would do a shameful thing if——"

Richard Samson knelt down beside her and took her in his arms.

"Susan — sweetheart, I'm here all right. Do you love me—a little?"

"Oh, Dick—Dick. Can you forgive?"

"Put your head on my shoulder, dear. There. Now cry it out. Dave won't show his face in these parts again, I reckon. Thank God, I was not too late."

A SPLENDID FICTION NUMBER.

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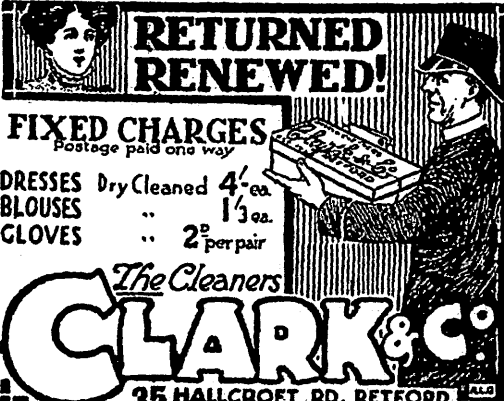
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Hunger and Two Golden Salvers

A VIVID STORY OF THE GREAT FROST FAIR ON THE THAMES,
AND OF THE DAYS OF THE LOTTERY IN LONDON

By WARWICK DEEPING

A YOUNG man in a ragged black cloak, with the scabbard of a rapier cocked under it, stood at the top of a flight of stairs that led down to the river. The brim of the man's hat flopped over a thin beak of a nose, a mouth that looked hungry, and eyes that were savage and sullen. The voracity of the man's face seemed to suggest an empty purse and a still emptier stomach.

The Thames was frozen hard from bank to bank, and all the fun of the Frost Fair could be had for a few pennies. People were coming and going on the stairs that led, as a rule, to a flock of bobbing boats. Red faces, laughter, steaming breath recalled such things as ale, roast beef, and pudding. And for this very reason the young man in the ragged cloak eyed these buxom people savagely.

"Curse them!" he thought to himself. "How well filled all the fat fools look! I could cut someone's throat for the sake of a good dinner."

He loitered a moment at the top of the steps, licking lips that were blue and cold. Perhaps it did not matter to him whither he drifted, for he wandered down to the frozen river, taking no notice of the people who passed him by. Low down in the western sky a huge red sun was sinking into a fog bank, and the winter twilight had a tinge of red in it that made the towers and steeples of the city look the more black and strange. The air was still, pitilessly still, as though it had been frozen from the very earth to the zenith overhead.

"God pity the poor," chimed the bells of London.

And the man in the ragged cloak cursed the voices of those bells.

"What do all these fat fools care," he thought, "whether a broken man starves this January?"

The frozen river was covered with fan-

tastic life. Down the centre ran a veritable street of booths, the burning flambeaux making a lane of yellow light. The Cheap itself seemed to have taken to the river. 'Prentices bawled and shouted one against another; hucksters yelled behind their trays and baskets; a great crowd went up and down with the murmur of many voices. There were side-shows of all kinds upon the ice: dancing dogs, marionettes, peep-shows, jugglers. Young men played at ninepins. Old women sat beside braziers and sold hot pies and baked apples. The ale booths hummed like beehives. The breath of this great concourse of people steamed up into the air.

The young man in the ragged cloak kept at a little distance from this lane of light, yet looking towards it now and again with an eloquent glare of the eyes. He was very hungry, very desperate, very much of an outcast, even from the dicing dens and taverns. Mingled with all this physical emptiness was the savage instinct of a broken man whose starved brain is full of desperate thoughts. Remnants of pride hung round him, and a sense of the recklessness that had made him what he was. The blackguard and the gentleman were hungry together under the same cloak, and since this hunger was fierce in him, the blackguard was the stronger man, the gentleman a poor client who hobbled along in silence.

"Hallo—John Shirley! Any money to lose to-night, my chicken?"

A big fellow with a huge yellow beard and the unmistakeable scent of Alsatia about him had flaunted past John Shirley, with the folds of a plum-coloured cloak turned back to show a black velvet doublet and a baldric of gold. He turned sharply on his heel, followed the man he had passed, and smacked him heavily upon the shoulder.

"What a blue nose you have, my

friend! As for being deaf and blind——!"

The man's gaudy clothes did not show their shabbiness in the twilight. A great crevice opened in the thick of the hair that half covered his face, and fat, insolent laughter came out of it. John Shirley shrugged himself free of the fellow's hand.

"Go to perdition!" he said, with a lifting of the upper lip.

The Alsatian eyed him with gross and amused pity.

"Hallo, my little man! Why so hot? Pockets burnt out, eh? There—there; it isn't all of us who have the grit to go bravely to ruin!"

He stood in front of John Shirley, spreading his legs, and puffing out his cloak.

"Hungry, eh? Well, I've silver to spare. And I've had my pickings, to be sure. Gentlemen should always be generous."

He put a hand into the pouch he wore at his belt, and brought out a fist full of money. Yet his rogue's compassion had an insolence that would have turned the stomach of a man who was not dead to pride.

John Shirley looked at the money; his nostrils expanded, his eyes filled with a glare of light.

"Out of the way! Do you think I would touch that?"

The Alsatian stared, and then began to chuckle, swaying to and fro at the hips.

"Wo—ho, little man! So hot on a pennyworth of pride!"

Shirley's hand went to the hilt of his rapier; but the other only laughed at him and danced the money up and down in his palm.

"Go and drown yourself, Johnnie; you will never live to be a good swashing rogue."

He tumbled the money back into his pouch, slapped it, gave his cloak a dramatic twitch, and walked off towards the Blackfriars bank. Shirley looked after him with evil eyes. Assuredly the Devil was abroad to drive him to some desperate measure.

Night had fallen, and Shirley joined the crowds that moved to and fro in the glare of the flambeaux. He wandered aimlessly from place to place, sullen and dull-eyed, a gnawing emptiness under his heart. The smell of the cooked victuals

came to him like a savour out of heaven. There was so much to eat here, so much to drink, if a man only had a little money. Yet a pennyworth of hunger shut him off from all hope. He had not a stiver in the pouch of his belt, and if he sold his cloak he was likely to die of the cold. As for his sword, he clung to it with the instinct of a man who has some last piece of respect left him.

"What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack?" bawled the 'prentices.

"Hot pies! Pies all hot!" piped a fat woman who sat on a stool beside a brazier.

Shirley felt a kind of madness rising in him. What right had these people to laugh and eat and drink when he had nothing but an old shirt under his cloak and doublet, and had eaten nothing for six hours? Why should he sneak up and down like a hungry dog, sniffing the scent of roast meat and not daring to touch it? Money! He had his pockets full a year ago, and people had adored him; and now that they were empty no one seemed to care. What a fool he had been to let himself be fleeced in the dicing dens and the taverns! For the moment he was ready to curse himself for not having taken the Alsatian's money. The great beast had emptied his pockets often enough! But no, he was in too fierce a mood to play the beggar to such a patron. He felt tempted to use his sword rather than his tongue.

The Frost Fair on the Thames maddened him so thoroughly that he broke away from it, and began to make his way back towards the northern bank. As he left the flaring flambeaux he saw a great yellow moon rising above the roofs and spires of the city. John Shirley stopped and stared at it. To the famished imagination of a man half crazed with hunger and humiliation, the moon looked like a huge golden salver that tempted some thief to tear it down out of the sky.

As he stood there, biting a cold under lip, and feeling his teeth inclined to chatter, two men passed him, talking in eager undertones.

"I shall try a ticket at the lottery," said one.

"Never did a poor beggar set eyes on such silver plate!" quoth the other. "Lord, but a man could cat his heart out

coveting the stuff. They tell me a tapster from Southwark won a dish yesterday that was worth a thousand pounds!"

The words of these two men danced through John Shirley's brain.

"The Lottery—silver plate—a thousand pounds!"

Instinctively his hand went to the leather pouch at his belt; and when he remembered that it was empty and that he had not even a shilling with which to buy one ticket, he fell to cursing in a dull, helpless way, and his eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Not one chance left," he said to himself. "What miserable luck!"

Yet though he had not a stiver in his pocket he continued his way across the ice, lured on by the chance words of those two men, his eyes turned to the great yellow face of the moon. Leaving the frozen river for the darkened streets, he wandered on till he found himself in an open space, and standing before a stone house whose whole façade was lit by torches set in brackets along the wall. An iron cresset, filled with sea coal, flared on the parapet of the building, sending a trail of smoke across the face of the moon. People crowded about the steps leading to the doorway, and at the top of the steps stood a man in a scarlet livery, swinging a bell and bawling to the crowd below.

Shirley forced his way through, climbed the steps, and made his way into the long, open-roofed hall in which the lottery was being held. All sorts and conditions of men and women were mingled together: men and women whose eyes seemed to reflect the glitter of the gold and silver plate ranged on a great dresser at the dais end of the hall. Men in livery were pushing hither and thither, selling the precious tickets that promised so much—and yet so little.

Shirley's dull and hungry eyes also caught the glitter of the piled-up treasure that was coveted by all these gamblers in tickets. He edged his way into a corner, and stood looking round with savage restlessness at the fortunate ones who were able to venture a shilling. These glimpses of human nature might have amused a man who was not desperate with hunger and defeat. But John Shirley was not there to be amused, though he smiled

with evil delight at a half-drunken drayman who was tearing up ten tantalising "blanks" and trampling upon the pieces with childish fury. Between the heads of two other men Shirley had a view of the face of a woman in black who was weeping silently and moving her lips as though in prayer. The woman's livid and miserable face evoked no pity in him. He was ready to mock at those who were fooled, and to detest anyone who had the insolence to be lucky.

A fellow who sold tickets made his way into Shirley's corner. The drunken drayman met the seller with a gush of abuse, and shouldered his way towards the door. Shirley felt someone move beside him. A hand was stretched out, offering a shilling.

"One ticket for me."

Shirley turned and stared at his neighbour, a girl in a red cloak, with the hood turned over her head. She carried a biggish basket covered with a white cloth, and looked like a serving maid who had been out shopping.

The man gave the girl a ticket for a shilling. She hesitated a moment, and, turning a pair of brown eyes to Shirley, asked him to hold her basket.

"How it makes one tremble!" she said.

But Shirley, who grudged her the chance that shilling had given her, took the basket sullenly without uttering a word.

He watched the girl's fingers unfold the slip of paper, wondering vaguely whether there was any luck in it. If he had been watching her face he would have seen the pupils of her eyes grow big and dark, and her lips quiver as though she were about to utter a cry. The girl in the red cloak had drawn the best prize of the day.

The people round her soon caught the rumour, and began to crowd and elbow, and crane their necks to see.

"What! She in the red cloak?"

"Pah! There's luck for you! Some little slip comes in with a shilling, and wins a gold plate!"

"Well, I would as lief see a poor girl win the stuff as anybody! It may get her a good husband."

"Good husband, indeed! She will be hunted by half the rogues in the kingdom."

The girl seemed dazed by her luck and



(Drawn by C. CLARK, R.I.)

"Shirley was on him before he could make up his mind either to fight
or to run" (p. 320).

by the interest she had aroused. She turned to Shirley, and spoke in a breathless undertone.

"Please—my basket."

He gave it her, thinking that he had never seen a comely girl look so repulsive, though it was his own savage envy that created the impression. Had there been less of the half-starved brute about John Shirley he might have seen that the girl's eyes shone with something much more beautiful than greed.

"What have you won?"

He spoke almost roughly, his voice harsh with emotion.

"Two gold salvers."

Shirley stood staring after her in stupefaction as she was pushed along by the people towards the dais end of the hall.

He remained in his corner, biting his lower lip, and listening to many evil voices that were prompting his hunger and disgust. If he had had a shilling and had bought that ticket! Why should this girl have such a wondrous stroke of luck? Two gold salvers! It was preposterous! What did she want with two gold salvers—this girl who had never been too hungry in her life? And Shirley hated her from the bottom of his heart.

The next thing that he noticed was the red hood of her cloak coming down the hall, with the people cheering and making a great to-do. What did the fools mean by cheering such a gross and ironical whim on the part of fortune? Shirley had a glimpse of the girl's face. It was radiant, yet a little dazed, and her eyes were full of a misty light. He could see that she was clasping that basket of hers against her bosom. And under that white cloth lay the two golden salvers!

Shirley choked with an inarticulate oath. He moved forward suddenly, elbowing the people aside. In another minute he was out of the building and half across the open space, following the girl in the red cloak. The very colour of that cloak seemed part and parcel of his mood of madness.

The girl walked at a rapid pace in the direction of the river, and Shirley dogged her down the dark and narrow streets. A cynical savagery smeared his thin face over with a detestable smile. The thing

seemed so easy. He would offer to guard this woman home, wait his opportunity and some quiet place, and those two golden salvers would be in the melting pot before to-morrow.

The girl reached the Thames, and took to the broad sheet of ice with the Frost Fair lane running down its centre. Shirley hastened his steps, and overtook her before there was any chance of her being lost to him in the crowd. The girl looked round sharply, with a frightened gleam in her eyes, when he came from behind and spoke to her.

"Pardon. Do you know that you are running a great risk? I followed you from the Lottery to see you safe home."

He swept his battered hat to her.

"Oh——!"

"I held your basket, you remember. You were one of the few lucky ones, and I was one who did not think it worth while to waste a shilling."

She paused and looked at him doubtfully, not remembering having noticed anything very particular about him when she was in the hall. The moonlight prevented her from judging the shabbiness of his clothes, and his voice was the voice of a gentleman. Moreover, the dark streets had frightened her, and she was ready to accept a friend.

"Have you to go far?" he asked.

"Some way up the river. I never thought that I should have to carry such a treasure home with me."

Shirley felt a cynical, yet soundless, chuckle rising in his throat.

"It will not be safe for you to go alone," he said. "Come, you can trust me; I was afraid that you might be followed. Half the rogues in London hang about that Lottery."

She looked at Shirley with frank, yet questioning eyes, thanked him, and started towards Westminster, keeping at a little distance from the booths, the flambeaux, and the crowd. The moon had climbed higher in the sky, and threw their shortened shadows on the ice. The girl walked in silence, holding her basket with both arms against her bosom. Shirley watched her out of the corners of his eyes. The starved brute in him was growing more importunate.

"How cold it is!" she said at last.

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The breath from their mouths showed
as white mist. Shirley licked his lips
with the point of a thin tongue.

"Bad weather for those who are
hungry!" he said. "But perhaps you
do not know what it is to be hungry?"

Something in his voice appeared to
strike a vague note of sympathy within
her. Why she should feel sympathy for
this man she could not tell, yet she
had a suspicion that he was in need
of it.

"I know what hunger is," she said,
"and in this bitter weather, too! But it
is sometimes harder to see others hungry.
That is why this strange good fortune
means so much to me. I have some food
here in my basket."

"Ah, to be sure!"

She held the handle of the basket with
one hand and turned back the cloth, and
brought out a slice from a meat pasty. She
offered it to Shirley without a word.

The man hesitated a moment, and then
took it. He began to eat ravenously,
walking along beside her in silence.

"I have some wine here, too."

Shirley felt a curious start of surprise.
For the first time it struck him that this
girl's voice was not the voice of a common
serving-maid.

"Wine?" he repeated.

She brought out a stone flask and held
it out to him. He took it, drew the cork
with his teeth, and drank.

A sense of warmth went through his
body. He felt his heart beating, his face
flushing in the keen moonlit air. And a
sudden instinct of gratitude—the gratitude
of the hungry animal that has been fed—
rose in him with sudden strength. He
gave the wine flask back to the girl.

"That was good," he said. "Verily,
I was in need of it."

She turned frank and compassionate
eyes to him in the moonlight.

"Somehow—I felt that you needed it."

"You?"

"I have been hungry myself—so hungry
that the frost seemed to freeze one's
heart."

Shirley stared at her, and a sudden
spasm of indefinable emotion swept
through him. A cold, cynical, and savage
something seemed to melt. Warm blood
beat in his brain, and in a flash he remem-

bered the deed that he had contemplated
against this girl.

"Ah, to be starved!" he said.

In those few seconds the whole man
was transfigured. It was as though that
food and wine had revived the better part
of him. The spirit of chivalry came to
life, grappled that starved and gambling
blackguard, his other self, and began to
throttle its cynical clamour.

"Fool," said the beast in him, "will
you throw away such a treasure—because
a wench rolls her eyes and gives you a
piece of mouldy pie?"

"Fiend!" retorted the nobler voice.
"To what foul treachery were you driving
me?"

While Shirley was experiencing this
great revulsion of feeling, he and the girl
in the red cloak had drawn towards the
southern bank of the river. They had left
the Frost Fair and its flambeaux far behind
them, and the Thames before them was a
solitary sheet of ice. Garden walls came
close to the frozen water, and here and
there the gables of a house rose black
against the winter sky.

The girl had glanced back over her
shoulder with the air of one who listened.
Shirley still walked on in silence, as though
possessed by his own thoughts. She looked
at him with anxious and questioning eyes.

"I believe that we are being followed,"
she said.

"Followed?"

"Look for yourself, and judge."

Shirley, waking like a sentinel who
has been leaning drowsily on his pike,
turned, and looked back over the ice
with its moonlit sheen. He saw the figures
of two men at no great distance. There was
a suggestive loitering about their move-
ments when he paused to watch them.

"How much farther have we to go?"
he asked her.

"Only a little way. There is a cause-
way that leads up between two houses."

Shirley moved forward again.

"If we have any trouble with the
gentlemen yonder," he said, "run on,
and leave them to me."

His right hand went to the hilt of his
rapier, while with the left he began to
unfasten the clasps of his cloak. For one
brief moment he felt a shock of astonish-
ment at the transformation of the whole

adventure. From wolf he had turned into sheep-dog. Yet what was this girl to him that he should risk anything for her? He wondered at this sudden chivalrous impulse that was as disinterested as the moonlight. Perhaps it was the wine, perhaps that touch of sympathy she had given to his heart.

They were walking rapidly side by side, Shirley glancing back from time to time over his shoulder.

"There is not much doubt about their being after us!" he said.

He heard her catch her breath. Her eyes turned to him suddenly.

"Why should you risk your life——?"

"I? That is a shrewd question."

"Let us give them the salvers. If there is a danger——"

Shirley's face was as fierce as the face of a hawk.

"No," he said, with an oath, "I am not a coward, whatever else I may have been. How far—now?"

"Here is the causeway."

Stone steps jutted out into the ice from a narrow causeway that led to a passage between the walls of two dark houses. Shirley heard the sound of men running cautiously over the ice. He pushed the girl up the steps, drew his rapier, and folded his cloak over his left arm.

"Run! I shall wait for them at the end of the passage."

She turned a white and determined face to his.

"No! I shall stay near you. I am not so cowardly."

"This is mere folly! Take the gold away!"

"Then it is folly in you to try and defend me!"

There was no time for Shirley to reason with her. He pushed her, half roughly, into the dark throat of the passage, and turned towards the river. The two men had climbed the steps, and the moonlight shone on drawn swords. The shape of the taller man was familiar to John Shirley. It was the Alsatian who had jeered at him and offered him money hardly three hours ago.

No parleying was done on either side, for the two rogues were in a grim hurry to dispose of Shirley and catch the girl before she could hide herself or gain

shelter. There was room for only one man on the causeway at a time, and the Alsatian came up it with the bravado of a bully who happens to be brave. Shirley was as cold as ice, watching the glitter of the moonlight on the Alsatian's sword and poniard.

"Out of the way—fool! We must hunt you out of that rat hole!"

Shirley was in the shadow, and the Alsatian made a lunge into the throat of the passage. The point of his sword caught in Shirley's cloak, and the flash of a counter-thrust came out of the darkness. The big man uttered a loud cry, staggered forward, and stabbed wildly at the darkness with the anguish of a wild beast that has come by its death wound. The Alsatian's poniard broke against the wall. He slipped sideways, struggled a moment, and then lay still.

The second fellow had faltered, and Shirley sprang over the Alsatian's body and was on him before he could make up his mind either to fight or to run. The man had no choice, yet the scuffle of steel in the moonlight was momentary and final. Shirley turned back, leaving the second man lying face downwards across the causeway, with his rapier broken under his body.

The girl in the scarlet cloak was waiting for Shirley at the far end of the passage. She stretched out a hand and touched his arm.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, not a scratch. Let us get away from this. There will be something there for people to talk about to-morrow."

He sheathed his sword, and they walked on together along a narrow and solitary lane with the branches of old apple trees overhanging it and spinning strange black webs against the moon. The frost had already turned the dew to silver upon the hedges and the grass. The sky looked pitilessly clear and cold, a frozen distance glimmering with stars.

The girl was silent for a while, as though some great thing had happened and she were thinking over it.

"What a debt I owe to you!" she said suddenly.

Shirley turned his head, and met her eyes.

"Why count the cost?" he answered,

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swinging his cloak over his shoulders and fastening the clasp.

Her eyes seemed full of the moonlight.

"I tell you: we will share this good fortune," she said; "it is almost as much yours as mine."

"What!"

"The two salvagers. You take one, and I will keep the other. My wonderful good fortune would have been of no use to me but for your courage."

She had taken one of the gold salvagers from the basket, and, as she held it out to him, Shirley saw by her eyes that she was in earnest. Yet he recoiled from this temptation as from the bite of a snake, wondering, at the same time, at the strength of this new impulse towards honour.

"Put it back in the basket," he said grimly; "you do not know what you are doing."

She still held the salver in her hand, and looked at him with her frank eyes.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

Shirley's face shone in the moonlight like the fierce white face of a fanatic.

"Why? I will tell you," he said, with a strange and passionate outburst against himself. "Because I am a broken man—a man who has been a desperate fool, a wretch who had not touched food for hours before you gave him that stuff out of your basket. You did not guess how near you were to a savage, half-starved villain! Well, it is high time that we said 'Good-night.'"

He paused, biting his lower lip and staring hard at the firelit window of a little old house, whose black timbers and white plaster made a brilliant contrast in the moonlight. A small garden surrounded the house, whose shaggy thatch came down in low eaves that cast a broad band of shadow. The girl in the red cloak stood quite still, looking at Shirley with her steady eyes. Then she turned and glanced at the window. A shadow moved across it—a shadow that somehow had the air of being decrepit and anxious.

"That is my home," she said, with slow, reflecting simplicity. "We are very poor. But once it was not so. I—too—have at times been very near to despair."

Shirley had meant to leave her abruptly, and to march doggedly away into the moonlight with the satisfaction of a man who has done a good deed by mistake, and who intends to take no credit for it. But the girl's voice kept him lingering. That voice of hers seemed to rouse in him a deep yet almost childish longing for things that had long gone out of his life.

"I am glad—of this good luck of yours," he said, looking at the firelit window, and thinking, with an involuntary spasm of loneliness, of the black city streets and the cold face of the moon. "Those—who have been without much luck—can understand."

She seemed to divine much of what was passing in the heart of this man.

"Come in and sup with me and my father. We are burning our last faggot; but this—will change all that."

She held up her basket, and Shirley felt bitterly ashamed.

"No, I cannot," he said.

"Cannot! Why? Do you think that I have no gratitude?"

She looked at him with shining eyes, and then suddenly glanced away. Shirley felt an almost oppressive throbbing of the heart. The glow of that firelit window, and the voice of this young girl! It was as though a door had been opened to him in the side of a cold, sordid, and detestable world.

His face changed suddenly, like the face of a man stepping from a dark passage into the firelight.

"God bless you," he said, "you are doing a braver thing than you can guess. I will come in and sit by your fire."

Her eyes trusted him, and in seeing the trust in them Shirley beheld a new light shining upon his shame.

"Come," she said simply, turning towards the door of the house.

And Shirley felt that he was taking sanctuary against his baser self.



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THE STORY-TELLER

The Forbidden Woman

By Warwick Deeping

*"The black figure paused, and waited there against the steel-grey sky.
"Who's there?"
"The moonlight showed him Hilary Blake.
"Ah, Captain Blake, come to apologise so soon!"
"No, sir, only to tell you that you are a liar."*

HILARY BLAKE went down through the tangled shrubs of the garden that was half a wilderness, and a strange, white awe was on his face.

Twice he paused, turned, and looked back. She was still there on the terrace, set high against the sunset—a strange, wet sunset, in which streaks of opalescent blue showed dimly through a vaporous glow of scarlet and of gold. Queer, slate-coloured clouds sailed low down across the sky. The far woods were the colour of amethyst. But Judith of the terrace was outlined against a clear breadth of gold. She was watching him, and he could imagine the provoking set of her head, and that enigmatic smile of hers that made men wonder.

She had been strangely kind to him that evening, and the fire of her beauty was in his blood.

How was it that she had been a young widow these five years, and that no man had won her a second time? She was proud, with a vague, elusive pride, a pride that baffled and kept men at a distance. And yet it had seemed to him that there was a great sadness behind those eyes, a dread of something, a loneliness that waxed impatient. Sudden silences would fall on her. He had found her looking at him in a queer and tragic way, as

though she saw some shadow of fate falling between them.

A spray of syringa brushed across his face as he walked on down the tangled path. It was wet and fragrant, and, with sudden exultation, he crushed it against his mouth. The smell of it was of June and of her.

He went on, head in air, marveling at all the tangle of chances that had brought this great thing to him. A year ago he had been Captain Blake, of the 7th Foot, leading redcoats by the Canadian lakes. He remembered that letter coming to him, that letter that told him how two deaths had made him Blake of Brackenhurst Manor. There had been that wild dinner in that block-house by the lakes, when all the fine fellows had drunk to Blake of Brackenhurst, and Red Eagle and his "braves" had gone mad with fire-water and set the store-house alight by shooting into the thatch. He had not seen Brackenhurst since he was a boy. He had come to it a little elated, and he had discovered her.

"Good-evening, Captain Blake."

Hilary had just let the wicket gate clash behind him. He turned sharply.

An old yew threw a deep shade here, shutting off the sunset, and, leaning against the fence under it, Hilary saw a big man in a long green coat, buff riding breeches and top boots. He wore a black, un-

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powdered wig under his three-cornered hat, and this dark wig set off the sallow and impassive breadth of a face that showed to the world a laconic arrogance. He had a little book of fishing flies in his hands, and as he played with it casually his eyes looked at Hilary Blake with an ironical insolence that was but half veiled.

Blake hardly knew the man, save by sight and reputation. He was Sir Royce Severn, of Moor Hall, a man with a mystery round him and more duels to his credit than his neighbours cared to mention. In fact, there was a sort of dread of him dominating the neighbourhood. He lived practically alone at Moor Hall, up yonder against the northern sky, a grim, secretive sort of creature who rode, and shot, and fished alone.

"Good-evening to you," and Blake's eyes added, "What the devil may you be doing outside Judith Strange's garden fence?"

The man seemed to have been waiting for that challenging look in the other's eyes. He gave a queer and almost noiseless laugh, and put his fly-book away in his pocket. A heavy hunting-crop hung on the fence. Sir Royce Severn tucked it with a certain cynical ostentation under his arm.

"I think we are strangers, Captain Blake."

"I think we are, sir."

"My way is your way for a mile or so. Do you take the path through the park?"

"I do."

He moved on, and the man in green set himself beside him. The sunset was on their faces, and up yonder Judith of the Terrace still stood outlined against a glow of gold.

Blake saw his companion look steadily towards her, and there was something in that look that made his blood simmer.

"Mrs. Judith stays out late on so damp an evening."

"And what the devil is it to you if she does, my friend," said Blake's eyes.

The man in green laughed, that quiet, threatening laugh of his.

"You come here very often, Captain Blake."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"I said, you come here very often. You are new to these parts; I know them better than you do."

A cold anger began to stir in Hilary Blake.

"My business is my own, Sir Royce Severn. Pray leave it at that."

The other answered him sharply.

"I deny that, Captain Blake; I deny that flatly. It is my business to tell you that Judith Strange is a dangerous woman."

The path had reached a spot where great oaks were gathered together, casting a half gloom over the grass. Under their canopies the stormy sky showed yellow and red.

Blake stopped dead and faced the man in green.

"I think, sir, you are a little mad—or very insolent."

"I am neither the one nor the other."

"You will leave a certain name untouched in my presence."

He saw two like points of light shine out in the other's eyes.

"That is the language that all of them have used, Captain Blake. Your good cousin talked like that, sir, though what right he had to mouth such heroics only his own silly conceit could tell. I have heard a great deal of such talk"—he shrugged and laughed—"it never moved me one iota."

Blake stared at him.

"Moved you, sir! What cause was there for you to be moved—one way or the other? Save that if you spoke lightly of a lady, it

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was right that some man should smite you on the mouth."

"That no man has ever done."

"Indeed!"

"I speak of Judith Strange as I please."

"I think not, sir."

"Captain Blake, you have never seen me handle a sword or mark my man with a pistol."

He drew himself up, squaring his shoulders; and his arrogant face was a threat, a face that loomed big and white and fanatical under the gloom of the trees.

Blake's eyes grew dangerous.

"Come out into the open, sir. What is at the bottom of all this boasting?"

Sir Royce Severn bowed to him.

"Captain Blake, let me suggest to you that you go no more to Judith Strange's house."

"Let me suggest, sir, that you mind your own business."

"Judith Strange is my business."

The younger man took a step forward, and his left arm went up. Severn's hunting crop whirled suddenly, and struck Blake's fist so that one of the knucklebones cracked. The pain of it made Blake stride to and fro, biting his lips.

"You devil!"

Severn laughed.

"You cannot hurt me, my friend.

I never met a cock yet who could face me in the pit. Judith Strange, Captain Blake, is to be my wife, and I have a sort of jealousy in me that is dangerous to calves. I say what I please about the woman I mean to marry."

Blake's face had gone dead white, but not with physical pain.

"I don't take you, sir."

"Oh, come, sir, come. You appear to know very little about women. Judith Strange would flirt on her wedding morning. But I, Captain Blake, want no youngsters playing round the woman I mean

to marry. If moths come to my candle, pff, I snuff them out. Only twice, sir, have men dared to fight with me. They did not need a second dose."

He tucked his hunting-crop under his arm, took off his hat ironically, and left Blake standing.

For the moment Hilary Blake's anger had died out of him. He saw Sir Royce Severn disappear among the trees, and felt himself a fool for having ridden the high horse. The man had had the laugh of him. It was all natural, and logical enough. Sir Royce Severn could be accused of neither madness nor insolence if he resented another man paying court to the woman who was to be his wife.

But Judith! And that wet sunset, and the walk upon the terrace, that leave taking, the brushing of the syringa across his mouth! A flare of pain rushed through him. He thought of the exultation of an hour ago, of the wonder of joy that had been in his heart.

Had she been playing with him, fooling him? What was he to believe?

He was lost in the chaos of his own emotions, of love, anger, scorn, hate, shame, and savage regret. He would go back and hear the truth from her own lips. But no, the laughter of a coquette would be too bitter for him to bear. Great God! was she that heartless thing? Why should he believe this man's word against her, throw over all that was sacred because of Severn's confident sneers?

Hilary turned, and began to walk back along the path, staring at the ground in front of him, forgetting his bruised hand. The splendour was dying in the west, and a blue twilight flowing into the valleys; the hills looked black and cold.

"Hilary!"

She had come on him suddenly out of the twilight, and the red

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brocade dress that she was wearing seemed to catch the last rays of the sunset, and to glow amid the gloom. She was breathing fast as though she had been running, and he could see the rising and falling of her breast.

Hilary had stopped dead, his head held high.

"Mrs. Judith!"

But that haughty poise of his was no more than hoar frost on a sunny morning. She came close to him till he saw the shine in her eyes, the proud rage of her white throat, and the way that glowing red brocade swayed up and down below a smother of white lace. Even the lover in him had guessed her capable of great passion, but now that he saw the full flare thereof he stood silent and astonished.

"That devil was waiting for you. I had looked for it. That is why I stayed upon the terrace. I knew that it must happen some day soon."

"Sir Royce Severn?"

Her passion did not give him time to speak.

"So, Hilary Blake, he has frozen or frightened you — after his fashion! You hold your head high and look at me with haughty eyes! Must I defend myself, I, who have never justified myself to any man? By Heaven, why should I stoop to defend myself before any man! Why? Even before you!"

Her whole figure seemed to glow in the twilight like metal at red heat, but her face was a stark white, her eyes challenged him.

He drew his breath in deeply, for this tempest of passion played upon the half-smothered fire in him like the wind.

"Judith, what have I said yet?"

"Ah, say it; let us have it spoken. Then I, too, will speak."

He looked at her, and a sudden generous shame smote him.

"No, by Heaven!"

She beat her hands together.

"Yes, by Heaven! But I can guess what Severn said, that I am to be his wife, that I have played with men——"

His silence answered her.

"He lied. Do you hear, he lied. My God, how I hate that man!"

She stood very still a moment, but it was the stillness of a wrath that found nothing strong enough to carry it to self-expression.

"Listen. For five years—ever since my husband died—this man has persecuted me. 'Judith, marry me,' he has asked, month by month, but I know that I had hated him from the first, and I did not hide my hate. But he is a devil, that man; he seemed to thrive on the 'Nays' I gave him, and he came and quarrelled month by month, by way of making love. I forbade him the house. He laughed, and said: 'Be sure that I shall not let you marry another man. I shall scare them away, or kill them if they refuse to be scared.' And he was as good as his word. Men sought me; I did not seek them, nor did I love any of those who came to me to make love. What did it matter? Each man dropped away in turn, and came no more. Three were cowards; two fought Royce Severn and were wounded; he swore that he would kill them the next time, and they took him at his word. Love was not worth the risk! Then he would waylay me somewhere, and be smooth, and courteous, and sneering. 'Judith,' he would say, 'no man will put me out of his path. You will marry me—or remain a widow.' And when I threatened to go away—marry, to spite him—he threatened in return. 'My dear, I shall follow you. And if you trick me, by marrying, you will be a widow again within a month.'"

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Strange as the tale sounded, Blake knew that it was the truth, and a fierce exultation woke in him. If she had not cared would she have told him this?

"The man is mad!"

"Mad, yes, but most accursedly logical in his madness. The Severns have been like that. Sometimes I feel that I shall take his life, or that he will take mine."

Blake took a step towards her.

"Judith, am I no more than the other men, the cowards, and the two who would not dare the uttermost?"

"I shall not answer you."

"By Heaven, you must! Why, even if you have no love for me, shall I slink away and not fight for the right to be near you! There is a devil in me that can match the devil in Royce Severn."

She gave a queer, inarticulate cry, and the fire died out of her eyes.

"No, no; that is why I followed you to-night. Hilary, I knew that you were not like those others."

"You knew that! Then——"

"No, no; listen. I have a feeling in me sometimes that I am a woman who is fatal to men—fatal to those who love me. A month ago I might not have cared, but now I care too much. Hilary, promise never to see me again."

He gave a grim yet exultant laugh.

"That is impossible. Judith, I will break this fate of yours."

He drew closer, but she put him back with her hands.

"No, no; have I not told you that this man is a devil? No one in these parts would dare to cross him. He can shoot as no mortal man should shoot, and they say that the best French swordsmen could not touch him. It is death."

He drew himself up, and his eyes smiled suddenly.

"If it be death, well, what of

that! My love is greater than Severn's love. I, too, can use foil or pistol, and a cavalry sabre is like neither of these. I shall fight this man."

She stood white and mute a moment, her hands hanging limply. Then suddenly her hands were upon his shoulders, her passionate face looking into his.

"Hilary, oh, my dear! No, no; I cannot bear it. Go away, leave me. I shall have your blood upon my hands, and then I think I shall go mad."

He caught her and held her.

"Judith, I cannot leave you. So I must kill Severn."

"But he——"

"Dear, the man is mortal. I say, I shall kill him."

"Yet, if you kill him——"

He lifted her face to his.

"Well, I might have to go over the water for a while. But I should come back."

"Hilary!"

He felt all the woman in her stirring in his arms.

"Hilary, I should be with you then, not here. Oh, if it were possible!"

"Dear, is this the truth?"

"The uttermost truth, the very heart of my heart."

He looked at her, very dearly, and then kissed her upon the mouth.

"So be it. Go back, my beloved. I have work to do."

He had to free himself, almost by force, for her dread returned.

"No, no; I shall never see you again."

"I swear that you shall. Dear heart, let me go."

He put her hands aside very gently.

"Judith, go home and wait. By morning I may have news for you."

In half an hour Blake was on the edge of the moor, walking as

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though for a wager. A mere cart track led over the moor to Moor Hall, and on either side of it were stretched masses of whin and heather. A moon was just rising, and all the countryside was spread below, the distant cliffs drawing a black outline about the glimmer of the sea. But Blake was watching the cart track in front of him. He had cut an oak sapling with his clasp-knife in one of the park plantations so that he should have something to match against Royce Severn's hunting crop.

Blake had guessed that he might catch his man on the homeward road, and catch him he did, just where the track turned eastwards over the ridge of the moor. Fifty paces ahead of him Blake saw a black figure rise against the skyline, almost between him and the rising moon.

"Sir Royce Severn."

The black figure paused, and waited there against the steel grey sky.

"Who's there?"

The moonlight showed him Hilary Blake.

"Ah, Captain Blake, come to apologise so soon!"

"No, sir, only to tell you that you are a liar."

He could not see Severn's face, for he had his back turned towards the moon.

"So you do not believe me, Captain Blake?"

"No, I do not, sir; or I should not have turned so far out of my way to call you a liar and a coward."

Both men felt that it had come, that they were like dogs doomed to be at each other's throats, but Severn strolled forward with a casual air, flicking his hunting-crop to and fro as though he were beating time to a piece of music. And that arrogant self-confidence of his fooled him. He had to do

with an athlete that night, a man who had matched himself to run and leap against Indians, and not with some heavy squireling or town gallant out of condition with drink and cards. For Blake took a standing leap at Severn, covered ten foot of ground at the spring, and got such a blow home as sent the big man sprawling.

Blake was on him, and had wrenched the hunting-crop away. He broke it across his knee, and threw the pieces into a furze bush.

"If you want a broken fist, sir, I have an oak sapling that will wipe out that blow you gave me two hours ago."

But Severn was up, in far too devilish a rage for sticks or fist-cuffs.

"Fool, I should have warned you with a sword prick through the arm, but now, by the woman I mean to marry, I will kill you."

"Leave it at that!"

"Choose your weapons. I'll meet you with whatever you please."

Blake smiled over set teeth.

"I claim cavalry sabres."

"The devil you do!"

"I have two. You shall have your choice."

Severn snarled at him.

"You prefer being slashed to pricked, eh? Very good. One second each will serve. At six to-morrow morning."

"When you please."

Severn became suddenly and splendidly polite.

"Captain Blake, it will be a pleasure. What do you say to that little field at the back of the fir plantation on the main road down yonder? You know it?"

"Yes."

"At six, then. I have a friend at my house who will act for me. I shall be happy to choose one of your sabres. I wish you a very good night."

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His politeness had thinned to an ironical and sneering playfulness, but Blake had been born with a stiff back. Yet he saw how Royce Severn had trodden on the courage of those other men, and half cowed them before they had crossed swords.

"It is a pretty thing, a cavalry sabre, sir. May you, too, pass a good night. I shall go home and get some sleep."

And so they parted.

Hilary Blake turned back for Brackenhurst, and in half an hour found himself standing in the brick porch of Colonel Maundrell's house at the end of Brackenhurst village. The colonel's old soldier servant answered his knock.

"Is your master in, Thomas?"

"Sure, sir; he is in."

"And alone?"

"And alone, sir."

Colonel Maundrell was sitting at the open window of his library that looked towards the sea. Two candles in silver candlesticks stood on the oak table, and their pale light seemed to mingle with the moonlight that streamed in at the window. The old soldier with the hawk's beak of a nose and the iron-grey head had been sitting there thinking.

Directly the door had closed and the sound of Thomas' footsteps could be heard departing Blake told his business.

"Colonel, I want you to second me. I fight Royce Severn at six to-morrow morning."

The old soldier sat forward in his chair.

"The devil you do!" And then, after a moment's silence, "Curse Royce Severn."

He rose, and drawing himself to his full height, looked searchingly at Blake from under his straight grey eyebrows.

"What has made you quarrel with Royce Severn?"

"A love affair, sir."

Maundrell pulled out his tortoiseshell snuff-box and took snuff vigorously.

"So you want to marry Judith Strange. I know how Severn has persecuted her. It is a pity someone has not shot the beast; I have thought of doing it myself. But do you know what you are doing, Blake?"

"I am going to marry Judith Strange."

"Yes, yes; all very well that. But this man Severn can shoot and fence like the devil himself. He is the coolest and most deadly beast when there is fighting a-foot. Who has the choice of weapons?"

"I have, sir; I have chosen cavalry sabres."

The colonel threw up his right hand with a stiff gesture of delight.

"Sabres, excellent! Severn's love is the foil. There are some men, Blake, who can never take kindly to sabre play, just as some men would rather be slashed than pinked through the liver. Sabres, excellent!"

He walked up and down, limping slightly, from an old wound that he had got at Fontenoy.

"Where do we meet, lad?"

"In the little meadow behind the fir plantation above Gaymer's farm."

"At six?"

"At six. I take the sabres. Severn has his choice. A friend is to second him."

"I know that friend of his. A little brown beast of a French fencing master. Sabres, excellent! Look you, lad, speed is the great thing against a man like Severn. Go at it, like a cavalry charge. I have known good swordsmen knocked over by mere slashing boys in a cavalry charge. It is no use playing the cunning game with Royce Severn."

"Thank you, sir. I am out to

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kill him in the first thirty seconds. I know something about sabres."

The colonel came and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Blake, you had better sleep here. Go up and get those sabres now it is dark."

"That is an idea, sir. I want to pack a valise, and get all the money I have in the house. I will ride my black horse down here and stable him for the night."

"Lad, you don't contemplate dying! That's the spirit."

"If I have to go, sir, I'll not leave Severn alive behind me. Judith shall be free."

It was a cloudless June morning when Hilary Blake and Colonel Maundrell got on their horses and took the lane that led round the back of the village past the mill. Blake's Canadian campaigning had hardened him, and he had slept for three hours. He carried a leather valise strapped to his saddle. The colonel had the sabres wrapped in a black cloth under his arm. Mists still hung about the valleys, and they could not see the sea.

Two labourers going to their work passed them, touching their hats and staring.

The colonel took snuff.

"Round - shouldered loafers! Drill 'em, and they make good soldiers. Jove! what a gem of a morning."

He chatted away cheerfully as though they were riding to a meet of hounds and not to a duel. Once or twice he searched Blake's face with a keen glance. It was pale but very determined.

"A good cock," he said to himself, "he'll fight like the devil."

They passed Gaymer's Farm and came to the fir plantation. It was black, and still, and secret, and gloom hung within the crowded trunks like a curtain. A rough gate opened through a ragged hedge. They dismounted, and

leading their horses, disappeared into the wood.

Judith Strange had not slept, for a man had come riding late up the drive between the old oaks, and had left a letter with the major domo, and galloped away again as though fearful of being called back. The letter had been sealed with red wax, and Judith had broken the seal and read the letter by candlelight in the long parlour.

"JUDITH,—I love you. I fight Severn to-morrow morning, and you shall be free. Do not try to come between us, for you will fail.
—HILARY BLAKE."

She had turned the letter over in her hands, and her gaze had rested on the red wax of the seal she had broken. The colour of blood! She had been seized by a foreboding of evil, by the thought that this thing was prophetic, that to-morrow the man who loved her might be dead.

She fought against this dread in her own heart, but she did not sleep. Her servants were a-bed; the candles had burnt out in the long parlour, and the full moon shone over the sea. Judith had stepped through the open window on to the terrace, and she walked to and fro there in the moonlight, feeling that she was helpless to hinder the workings of her own fate.

Then she rebelled, thrust her forebodings aside, and refused to believe in her own fears. She returned to the house, found a little hand lamp burning in the panelled hall, and taking it went up the broad stairs to her room at the end of the long gallery. There was a valise under the bed. She pulled it out, and began to fill it with clothes, and to collect her jewellery and store it away in a rosewood case bound with brass. Nor did she forget the guineas she kept in the secret drawer of her bureau.

By Warwick Deeping

Then she dressed herself as for a journey, with a kind of tenderness towards herself and towards her love, putting on one of her red brocades and a black beaver hat with black feather. She looked long at herself in her glass, touching her black hair with her fingers, on which she had thrust the most precious of her rings. Emeralds and rubies glittered in the lamp-light, and her eyes were almost as feverish as the precious stones.

She sat down in a chair by one of the windows and waited. Hours passed, the dawn showed in the east; the lamp had burnt all its oil, and had flickered out. The silence was utter. An anguish of restlessness returned.

A clock struck five. She rose, passed out of the room, down the dim stairs, and through the long parlour on to the terrace. The freshness of the dawn was there, and the birds were awake in the thickets. She began to walk up and down, up and down over the stone flags, with the heavy mists lying in the valleys below, and the sea hidden by a great grey pall.

The boom of a gun came from the sea. It was some fog-bound ship firing a signal.

The clock in the turret struck six. A gardener appeared upon the terrace, saw Judith walking there, stared, and slunk away. She was conscious of a strange oppression at the heart, a sudden spasmodic quickening of her suspense. She could walk no longer, but sat down on the dew wet parapet and waited.

Suddenly the mist lifted. The great trees in the park seemed to shake themselves free of their white shrouds. The vapour drifted away like smoke; the grass slopes and hollows showed a glittering greyish green.

Judith stood up, her eyes dark and big in a pale face, for far away, over yonder, something moved amid

the trees. She pressed her hands over her bosom and waited. And then she saw a galloping horse, and a man bending forward in the saddle, a little figure, distant in the morning light.

Which was it? She strained her eyes, but could not satisfy her suspense. Twice had Royce Severn ridden to her in just such a fashion, to make mocking love to her and to tell her that he had left a rival cowed and beaten.

Suddenly her heart leapt in her. The man had galloped near; he had seen the figure on the terrace, he waved his hat.

She gave a strange cry, ran to the terrace steps and down them to the path that led through the wilderness.

They met where a climbing rose trailed in the branches of a half dead almond tree. Blake had left his horse at the wicket gate.

She saw the grim radiance of his face.

"Hilary!"

"I have killed Royce Severn."

She swayed forward, and he had her in his arms.

"Oh, my beloved, you are as white as death."

"Dear, I have suffered."

He kissed her.

"Judith, you are free. But this man's blood——"

She clung to him.

"Let us go away, let us go away together. Yes, I have money, and my jewels, and my valise packed. I will order the coach. They cannot harm you, Hilary, for killing him, and yet——"

He looked in her eyes and understood.

"Dear, we will leave the thought of it behind us. Come, there is no time to lose. We can make Rye town before noon."

They went up the terrace steps hand in hand.

WARWICK DEEPING.

THE LITTLE FOP.

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By WARWICK DEEPING.

Author of "Love Among the Ruins,"
"The Seven Streams," "Uther
and Igraine," "Mad
Barbara," &c., &c.

He came riding in blue velvet, a lace collar, a foot wide over his shoulders, his fair hair floating like a cloud of fax. His plume in his leaver was fit for a giant, and his horseman's boots of red leather looked like great trumpet-shaped flowers with his boy's legs no bigger than a butterfly's proboscis. His rapier was as long as a man's, and his baldric all gorgeous with golden embroidery. Perhaps he was 16 years old, but he had all the airs of a great lord of the King's Court, of a man who had ridden through the wars and sat at the council board debating weighty matters.

His horse was a fine roan, and a servant followed behind him on a stout pad. The man had a swarthy, solemn face; perhaps he needed its solemnity, perhaps not; the boy in front of him might not be all lace and feathers.

June sunlight at six o'clock in the evening, a wooded and rather savage country, no house in sight, and a very rotten road that struck two ways at once, were details that needed consideration. The boy reined in, and sat like a war lord, scanning the landscape.

"A pretty boast you have made of it, Barnaby. We are lost, and you know it."

"We must come somewhere, sir, if we ride long enough."

The boy turned and looked into Barnaby's imperturbable face. He laughed.

"What a sententious, solid rogue you are! Well—I'll forgive you. We will bear to the right."

They rode another two miles, the track growing less and less considerable till it brought them to the palings of a park. There was a gate here, but the gate was chained and padlocked, and there was no lodge, and therefore no lodge-keeper. A few deer could be seen moving through the bracken.

The boy put his horse at the gate

through the bracken.

The boy put his horse at the gate and jumped it.

"Come along, Barnaby. We can't be far from a house, and a good supper."

The servant was less adventurous, and he weighed 18 stone. It seemed simpler to lift the gate from its hinges, and to lead his pad through. Master Bluecoat had cantered on ahead up a long low hill dotted with oaks and covered with bracken. Rabbits went scurrying; the deer trotted off towards a beechwood; the figure on the roan horse topped the hill.

A stream ran in the valley, beyond the hill, and spread into a lake that thundered over a weir. Master Bluecoat's horse was cantering over the soft turf, and the noise of the falling water was considerable, and so it happened that he surprised a girl who was standing on the narrow stone bridge and staring at the water. Her elbows rested on the stone coping and her two fists were clenched under her chin. She was wearing a gown of some green stuff, and there was a red rose in her hair.

Master Bluecoat swung down at a gallant canter, and suddenly she heard the thudding of his horse's hoofs, and started like a sentinel caught drowsing at his post. Her hand went into her bosom. The boy on the roan horse had a glimpse of a fierce, girlish face, very white and determined, with straight black brows, and a resolute red mouth.

She had covered him with the pistol before she discovered her mistake. Her hand had gone up on the impulse. It fell again, slowly, but the anger remained in her eyes.

"A peat on you, startling me like that!"

Master Bluecoat stood in the stirrups, and swept his hat to her.

"Fair mistress, I ask your pardon. I and my servant were put on the wrong road, and lost ourselves. I saw your park palings, and jumped the gate, assuring myself that a house of good omen must lie very near. But let me assure you that had I known of your timidity—"

"Timidity! Indeed!" she showed her teeth in a quick, ironical laugh.

her teeth in a quick, ironical laugh.

"You think I am timid?"

"Well, fair mistress, if you carry a pistol in your bosom, and pull it out when a stranger comes along—what is a man to think?"

"A man! To be sure, I was not waiting for a little jackanapes; that is why I had a pistol with me."

"That was a sharp gibe, my lady! Let me tell you I can hold my own with a man."

She pretended to be impressed.

"And who may you be, fair sir?"

He bowed in the saddle.

"I am Richard Furnival, a page of the king's. As for my titles and estates, the name of Furnival carries them on its back. The turn is yours, fair mistress."

She curtsied to him, but there was mockery in her eyes.

"We are but country folk, sir, the Haddens of Shire Hall. We boast of a baronetage, and no more. My name is Elizabeth, sir, though my brothers call me Bess."

Barnaby appeared upon the scene at this moment, but Richard Furnival ordered him out of earshot.

"Get you yonder, Barnaby, and wait by that oak."

Barnaby lifted his hat to the lady and rode back up the hill.

"And now, Mistress Elizabeth Hadden, in what way can I serve you?"

She raised her black brows.

"Serve me? Indeed, what makes you so forward, my pretty boy?"

"Boy! I am as old as you are, and I have lived with men, Mistress Hadden, and held my own with the finest gentlemen in the kingdom."

"La, your hat and boots are heroic, sir!"

"Scoff as you please. I am going to ask for a night's lodging."

"Ours is not a gay house, sir. I live alone with my brothers, and one of them—is—sick. But certainly, you and your man shall be lodged."

"I thank you. And now, for my service. Look on me as a man of spirit, and a man of honour, Mistress Hadden. I can play a part. Why did you flash a pistol in my face?"

"Gemini! You have a fine crow, sir! You talk like a stage gallant of 80. And you are not so tall as I am."

"Re Jupiter!—I'll hold you to

am.

"By Jupiter!—I'll hold you to that!"

He dismounted, left Nicholas standing, and took up the challenge. They looked at each other intently. Bess Hadden was a tall wench; neither would have much to boast of.

She smiled at him derisively.

"Do not tiptoe, sir; and the heels of your boots are enormous! I have you—beaten!"

He kicked off his boots and stood up in his stockings.

"No, by Caesar!—I have half-an-inch to the good. My man shall measure us. Hi, Barnaby!—come you here!"

It was a surprising business, with these two young people standing stiffly back-to-back, the lad's fair hair touching the girl's dark curls. But Barnaby never moved a muscle over it; he was all gravity, attention.

"Take my sword, Barnaby, and find our levels."

Barnaby did so, screwed up one eye, hesitated judiciously, and then gave his decision.

"The lady has it by half-an-inch, sir."

"Sirrah!—she has shoes on."

Mistress Bess kicked them off.

"Now!"

Barnaby sized them once more.

"Not the breadth of a hair in it, sir! I can't give it either way."

He withdrew the sword, and Master Furnival turned, and swept her a fine bow.

"You will withdraw your boast, Mistress Hadden. I withdraw—on my side."

She curtsied.

"Perhaps you are taller than I thought you, Master Furnival. In my brother's name I offer you our hospitality. We shall be honoured by the presence of such a noted gentleman."

She led the way across the bridge, and Dick Furnival, having put his boots on, left Barnaby to bring on the horses, and joined himself to Mistress Bess.

The house showed at the end of the avenue, a red house, with great windows with stone sills and mullions, a clock-tower, battlements, and an open loggia of stone joining the two wings.

"Certes, a mighty comely house."

the two wings.

"Certes, a mighty comely house, Mistress Hadden."

He made conversation like a courtier, gracefully and with the assurance of a man of 30.

"Where did you learn to be so old, sir?"

"I have been bred in a noble

school, Mistress Hadden. If I am a little wiser than my beard, lay the blame on those who taught me."

She tossed her handsome head.

"And does our garden please you, and the moat, and the swans in it, and the peacocks on the lawns? To be sure, we are mere bumpkins. And no doubt you will be glad of supper."

They reached the house across the lawns, a couple of peacocks sweeping up, and following Bess Hadden with friendly pomp.

"Enter, Sir Richard!"

An old serving-man in black melted away before the wave of her hand. She crossed the great hall with its long tables, ascended three oak steps, and threw open the door.

"Hilary, here is a gentleman, Richard Furnival, who has lost his way. I have offered him hospitality for the night, or rather—he has asked for it."

In the bay window with its heraldic glass a man was sitting at the table, reading. He pushed his chair back and rose rather awkwardly, looking like a bird disturbed on its perch at night. He stooped; his face was thin and long and mild; his blue eyes looked short sighted; he smiled when there was no reason for smiling.

"I am sure that you are very welcome, sir."

Bess vanished, and left Richard Furnival to make the best of this round-shouldered brother of hers.

Then a man-servant came to call them to supper.

It was a triste and embarrassed meal, taken in a panelled room whose broad window overlooked the garden and the park. Furnival noticed that Elizabeth Hadden chose a place where she would be facing the window, and that he himself was placed with his back to it. He noticed too that Hilary seemed afraid of his sister; he had the air of a man who had failed at a crisis and was conscious of his own

crisis and was conscious of his own futility.

Dick Furnival was very much on the alert, for Bess Hadden's eyes were restless, watching for somebody or something. She hardly touched the food on her platter, but she drank a full goblet of red wine. The scholar was content with a cup of milk.

She rose at the end of the meal, and looked at her brother.

"Hillary, will you ride over to Keasterton. John is not so well. Dr. Islip should see him."

Furnival's ears and wits missed nothing.

"Mr. Furnival, will you try and amuse yourself for an hour. I must leave you alone—for a while; my brother needs me above."

He bowed to her.

"Forget that I exist, Mistress Hadden.—I will pick up a book and read."

He was left alone in the long room, and he betook himself to the window seat, but he did not read. A single glance through the window, and he drew back suddenly behind the folds of one of the casement curtains.

A man was riding down the avenue of beeches; he dismounted at the bridge over the moat, hooked his horse's bridle over the railings, and came across into the garden. He was a youngish man, very big and lusty, with a handsome and rather insolent face, but it was the cheerful swagger of his walk that made Dick Furnival take particular note of him. The lad had a hawk's eye for a man's temper and manners. He knew the difference between Alsatia and the ante-chamber of a King.

The fellow was dressed in a suit of plum-coloured velvet. He carried his hat in his hand and he began to walk to and fro across the lawn in front of the house, his sword cocked, his eyes scanning the windows. It was more than obvious that he was waiting for some one like a big dog going to and fro outside a gate, and daring some smaller dog to come out.

Richard Furnival's eyes became strangely bright. His boy's face hardened.

"Hallo, my ruffler, so you will help me to read this rebus!"

me to read this rebus!"

He drew away from the window, and stood listening. The stairs came down close to the door of the oak parlour, and Richard Furnival heard cautious footsteps descending the stairs. In a flash he had crossed the room and flung the door open, and found himself face to face with Elizabeth Hadden.

He did not give her time to prevaricate or to pass him by.

"Mistress Hadden, there is something here that I would show you."

"I am busy."

He placed himself so that the doorway was open to her.

"I ask you a favour. Come and look out of that window."

She began to be angry.

"I shall not."

"Then you know who is there—walking in the garden?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"I take him to be the gentleman, Mistress Hadden, for whom you carried that pistol."

She stared at him speechless. But in a few seconds she found her tongue.

"You are an impudent, meddling jackanapes."

"Pardon me, Mistress Hadden, I am your friend, and a man of honour. Why not trust me. That fellow out yonder is built for a thrashing, and Brother Hillary cannot do it, eh?"

She turned scarlet.

"Oh! You detestable——"

"Mistress Bess, you wrong me; I have a very gallant desire to serve you, in spite of your taunts. Believe me, I can serve you, revenge your brother, and humble that ruffler out yonder."

"Mr. Furnival, you have a very high opinion of yourself."

"Mistress Bess, I am not boasting. Why not tell me what your quarrel is?"

"You are bold in asking."

"I do not deny it, but I stand my ground."

"Then, by heaven, Richard Furnival, you shall know the truth. That man out yonder has pestered me to be his wife; I would have none of him, and he grew insolent, and threatening, swore he would have me, humble me, and that my brothers dared not stop him. He robs over each evening and swag-

brothers dared not stop him. He rode over each evening, and swaggered up and down there. Two evenings ago my brother John tried to have him put out by the servants, but he threatened them with his pistols. Then he and my brother fought. He is a good swordsman, and he ran my brother through the shoulder. 'To-morrow I will come for Master Hilary,' he said. He came, but Hilary! It would have been murder. Hilary can handle a pen, but not a sword. So I shall deal with the man myself."

Richard Furnival bowed to her.

"That you shall never do. I will deal with the gentleman."

Her dark eyes looked at him doubtfully.

"You! But you are a mere boy—"

"I have the wrist of a man. Mistress Bess, I know what I am saying. I began to fence when I was five; I have held my own with Le Treport and Dick Maskerville, the two best men in London."

She was still incredulous.

"But Nicholas Gage is a grown man, and a beast for strength. No, I —"

He laughed.

"Mistress Bess, I am not boasting. I shall go out gallily, and I shall fight for your good will. Come, trust me; I am older than my years."

"I like it not. Supposing—"

"Pardon me, I am going. You can watch from the window. And believe me to be your very humble servant."

He turned, and crossed the hall, and went out by the great door into the late light of a June evening. And Bess Hadden did not call him back, for somehow, she had begun to believe in him, mere lad that he was.

Nicholas Gage had halted by the sundial, and was leaning an elbow on it, and staring at the house. He saw the little fop in his blue velvet coat and breeches and red leather boots come stepping out with all the airs of an exquisite gallant. Richard Furnival carried his plumed hat in one hand, a lace handkerchief in the other. He walked across the grass as though he were stepping after a dancing master, pointing his toes, and fluttering his handkerchief to and fro.

Bess Hadden had gone to the window.

window.

When Richard Furnival came within ten paces of the sundial, he drew himself up, and bowed with a prodigious sweep of the hat.

"Mr. Nicholas Gage, I believe?"

The big man ignored all this damboyant fooling.

"And who the devil may you be, Master Butterfly?"

"A gentleman, sir, who has taken upon himself the duty of teaching you manners. My name is Richard Furnival. I have the honour of being Mistress Elizabeth Hadden's champion and friend."

Gage's florid face looked ominous.

"Listen here, my little blue-bottle, get you away and buzz elsewhere. I am not here to play the clown with a boy of your age."

"Good sir, I disagree with you. I must ask you to face about, and march back over that bridge. I'll give you while I count 20."

"Twenty cuts with the scabbard of my sword on those pretty breeches of yours!"

He made a dash for the lad, but found himself held off by the point of a sword.

"Draw sir, draw. One could not have a prettier piece of ground to fight on."

Gage held back, furiously contemptuous.

"Put that bodkin away—"

Furnival threw his hat aside, and stood on guard.

"Come, sir, I am going to fight you; make no mistake about it. I have crossed swords with better men than you. Draw, or shall I have to call you a coward?"

Gage's sword flashed out.

"Well and good, you young ape. I will blood you in the arm, for the sake of a lesson."

Bess Hadden leant through the open window, and watched them. The laughter had gone out of her eyes; she was desperately concerned now for the young gallant in the blue coat.

She saw Nicholas Gage start his sword-play with a malicious confidence that smiled, but it was the smile of a man who had no intention of being generous. The boy had angered him, got in his way, and he meant to hurt Dick Furnival, and never doubted his ability to do so

Yet before they had been at work for 20 seconds Bess Hadden saw that something strange and ironical was about to happen. The boy was a perfect swordsman, light on his feet, cool, amazingly quick. His fencing made Nicholas Gage look muscle-bound, ponderous, and hopelessly slow.

The light came back into her eyes. Surely — this was an amazing youngster!

She caught her breath, for it looked as though Furnival had run Gage through the body. Then she saw the boy smile.

"Be careful, sir. I could have pinked you then. You are too slow, too slow."

Nicholas Gage had a face of fury, for he had seen Mistress Elizabeth Hadden watching them from the window.

"Too slow, am I, you young fool! Stop that—if you can!"

It was a savage thrust meant to kill, but it was parried adroitly, and the counter thrust spitted Gage through the right shoulder. The blade had touched a main nerve, for Gage's sword fell out of his hand, and his arm hung paralysed.

Richard Furnival drew back three paces.

"Now, sir, I have kept my word. Mount your horse, ride home, and send for a surgeon. And let me hear no more of this insolence towards Mistress Hadden. I ride to and fro from London very frequently, and I shall have an eye on you, sir. And the next time I have to fight you I shall kill you."

Then Barnaby appeared, Barnaby the imperturbable who always contrived to be on the alert when his master was mixed up in some adventure.

Richard Furnival called the man to him.

"Barnaby, give that gentleman his sword, tie up his arm for him, and help him up on his horse. Mr. Gage, I wish you good evening."

He sheathed his sword, picked up his hat, and walked back to the house as though just returned from a quiet stroll in the garden.

Elizabeth Hadden met him in the great hall, and dropped him a fine curtsy.

"Mr. Furnival, I am inches shorter

than you are, even though I were to put on my high-heeled shoes."

"Mistress Elizabeth," he answered her, with a bow that equalled her curtsy, "your spirit is as high as mine. I salute it. I have warned Mr. Gage that I shall be riding this road again, and that I shall kill him if he should dare to pester you a second time."

She looked at him with bright and provoking eyes.

"So, Mr. Furnival, you will ride this way again?"

"With all my heart, Mistress Bess."

He kept his promise and Barnaby to keep his master company, fell in love with Mistress Hadden's maid.

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STORY TELLER
The Blind Marriage

By Warwick Deeping

"There was a spirit in this woman that revived his courage.
"Tell me what you wish me to do."
"I shall ask you to marry a girl before midnight."
"Marry—and to-night. And who?"
"She answered sharply: 'My daughter.'"



AMBROSE FLETCHER pushed his chair back and rose. For three minutes he had been staring at nothing, his face the colour of his lace cravat, a young face that was haggard and expressionless.

One or two habitués cocked their eyes at him with cynical curiosity. The old lady with the nut-cracker nose and chin, who had been playing next him on his right, flirted her fan, and then rapped him across the knuckles with it.

"Cheer up—child. You will win to-morrow."

Young Fletcher tried to rally himself, to smile, to carry it off with an air of casual audacity. But his smile was a ghastly thing on so young a face. He was fumbling for his snuff-box, but his fingers trembled so that he could not open the lid.

A fat man in a purple coat was stuffing money and pieces of paper into his pockets. Ambrose Fletcher watched him, vaguely conscious that some of those bits of paper bore his signature.

Someone nudged his neighbour.

"That youngster there is going to shoot himself."

"Oh—fiddlesticks!"

Ambrose Fletcher wandered from the gaming room as though he had not the slightest notion where he was going. Madame Raffaeli's "establishment" was very full that

June night. The ballroom was a jostle of colour, of nodding feathers, sweeping hoops, fluttering dominoes, powdered wigs. All the women were masked; hundreds of eyes glittered through the slits in the black velvet vizards. The great room was hot, riotously hot, and reeked of lavender, musk, unguents and pomades.

Ambrose Fletcher leant against the wall. He felt sick and giddy and frightened, for a fool's panic was upon him, the nausea that attacks youth when it has mixed its wines and gambled itself into blank ruin.

He had not noticed that someone had followed him from the gaming room, a woman wearing a black domino with a hood that could be turned up to cover her hair. When Fletcher made a move—she followed him. He walked through the throng like a man going to the block.

He passed a crowd of footmen on the stairs. They looked at him curiously, winked, nudged each other.

"Ever seen a sick duck, Tom?"

"He's soft; old Raff has clawed him. Go home to mother, sweetheart!"

The woman in the black domino followed him down the stairs. The footmen eyed her interestedly. All sorts of people came to Raffaeli's; all sorts of strange things happened there.

Ambrose Fletcher reached the street. It led him to a square sur-

The Blind Marriage

rounded by tall houses; plane trees had been planted there, and they looked like huge black plumes against the starlit sky. He was conscious of the freshness of the night air after the heat of that room, with its reek of scents and oily perfumes.

And this same freshness suggested mind-pictures that brought a rush of emotion. He thought of the hay in the fields at home, of the little trout stream, of the old lady snipping off dead roses in the cool of the evening. Heavens—what had he done! He had gambled the place away, lost it to those wretches in yonder. It would have to go, his mother would have to take some cottage.

It was no use; he could not face it. Such a fool was better out of the way. He stood under one of the plane trees, lower lip adroop, one hand clenched on the hilt of his sword.

The river lay down yonder. Or should he go quietly to his lodging, and use one of those travelling pistols?

Then someone touched his sleeve. He started, glanced round petulantly, and saw a woman standing by him.

"My friend, I have something to say to you."

He drew aside. "I am not the man you seek."

He saw the gleam of her eyes.

"You may be the very man. I will ask you a question. You were thinking a moment ago whether it should be the pistol or the river."

It was a shrewd shot if a chance one, and he stared at her like a fool.

"Madam, you are very good at guessing."

"Oh, no; I was there at Rafaeli's. I was there with a purpose. I noticed you, I watched you, and I followed you. I said to myself, 'Here is the man I want, the man

who is going to shoot himself.' So I am here."

He was so ready to pity himself that he assumed her to be a Samaritan.

"Madam, I am very grateful to you——"

"Tush, I do not waste sentiment on you, on a callow bird from the country that has been plucked. I was in search of a fool who is in a mad mood, desperate, ready to put himself to strange uses——"

His chin went up; his dignity shook its poor feathers.

"Madam, I am a man of honour. If you think I'll do murder for you——"

She beat her hands together.

"Ass—do not start braying. Tell me, are you married?"

"No."

"Most excellent. And you are a young squire from the country—a young gentleman who has tried to keep pace with the town bucks, and found himself in a ditch."

He began to show resentment.

"Madam, I can see no reason for standing here while you——"

She caught him by the arm, and her grip was as strong as a man's.

"Then we will walk on together. Give me your arm."

He obeyed her. There was a vehemence about this woman in the black domino that overmastered him.

"Would you like to do a good deed before you die, a deed that will harm no one—but save a soul from much suffering?"

Her voice thrilled him strangely. It had changed; there was passion in it, a note of tenderness.

"Madam, I might be ready."

"Might—might! What word is that? Answer me like a man."

There was a spirit in this woman that revived his courage.

"Tell me what you wish me to do."

By Warwick Deeping

"I shall ask you to marry a girl before midnight."

"Marry — and to-night. And who?"

She answered sharply:

"My daughter."

So tensely strung was he that he broke suddenly into reasonless and uncontrollable laughter. The woman stood and waited with an air of self-restrained contempt until he had mastered himself.

"Well—have you done?"

He bit his lip.

"Madam, I ask your pardon. I did not mean to laugh, I assure you."

"Just a braying—and no more!"

He stiffened, and offered her his arm. She found it less limp and nerveless than before.

"Let us walk on. I am in your hands, madam."

"Then you consent?"

He was reverting towards recklessness.

"Yes; what does it matter to me. If I can serve anyone—why should I refuse? And yet, madam——"

She turned sharply into a lane, dragging him round with her. The lane ran between a wall and a high hedge; a light glimmered here and there. They had left the shadows of Soho and St. James behind them, and were among gardens and fields.

"You would like to know the why and the wherefore? I will tell you. My daughter is an heiress; my husband cannot lay fingers on her money, but he can sell her to a man who will pay monstrously for the bargain. That is what is happening. I have fought, stormed, pleaded. To what use? My husband is a fashionable and dissipated gentleman. The law is with him; he is as determined as I am. I was sold to him; I will not see the same bargain made over my daughter. And the one who is to buy her is an even lower creature

than my husband. That is why I mean to cheat them to-night."

Ambrose Fletcher stared in her face.

"But, madam, you forget; I may be dead to-morrow."

She answered impatiently.

"Yes, yes; no doubt. I know what I am doing. You will serve for to-night. Leave it to me."

He began to wonder whether he was in his senses or whether Rafaeli's wine was still in his head.

"But your daughter, madam. Will she——?"

"Avice will do anything to escape this husband. All I ask of you is to keep your lips shut, say nothing about this departure of yours for the next world."

A little shiver ran through him. It was like the first plaintive cry of a bird before the dawn; the youth and the will to live were stirring in the darkness.

"Madam, you can rely on me. But I neither know your name——"

"You shall have it. I am Sophia Percival; my husband is Jordan Percival—Lord Malplaquet. And your name, sir?"

"Ambrose Fletcher."

"The Fletchers of Dorsetshire?"

"Yes."

"Good stock."

They reached a door in a wall. Sophia Percival drew out a key, and unlocked it. They passed through into a garden. A house loomed up, black and silent.

More opening of doors, more mystery, and Ambrose Fletcher found himself in an upstairs room, a long, low-ceilinged room, panelled in oak. Two candles stood on a table; the windows were heavily curtained. By the table sat a man in a white wig and a black coat, spectacles on nose, a book on his knee. There was a couch in a far corner, and on it a girl in a white dress lay asleep.

The man in black rose.

The Blind Marriage

"We are here, Parson John."

The clergyman stared at Ambrose and then glanced at the girl.

"Poor child!"

Sophia Percival pulled off her mask. She was a very dark woman, with a strong, fierce profile—the face of one who had suffered but had never surrendered.

"How she sleeps!"

She turned suddenly on Ambrose Fletcher, and her eyes had a kind of merciless courage.

"Mr. Fletcher, I will hide nothing from you. My daughter is blind."

"Blind!"

He winced, and then caught himself with a grip of scorn.

"What does it matter—if I am to die?" He spoke the words to himself, but the lust to live was growing stronger.

He bowed to Lady Malplaquet.

"I am ready, madam, to play my part."

And the girl on the couch awoke. She raised herself on one elbow, and as she did so her face came into the light. Her eyes were wide open, soft hazel eyes that did not look like the eyes of one who was blind.

Her mother went to her.

"Avice. Get up, child. I have found someone to save you——"

She hid her face on her mother's shoulder.

"Oh—what a choice, what a leap into the dark!"

"Courage. It may prove better than you imagine. Mr. Fletcher, let me present you to your bride."

Ambrose crossed the room, obeying Sophia Percival's voice rather than any impulse of his own.

"Avice, here is Mr. Ambrose Fletcher, who has promised to marry you."

She stood up timidly, and yet with a kind of pathetic dignity, drawing a little apart from her mother. And for the first time Ambrose Fletcher saw her face clearly. It was one of those pale,

elfish faces, broad at the forehead, and narrowing towards the chin. The brown eyes showed no blemish. Her mouth was a soft, red-lipped, tragic mouth, made for passionate kisses. There was something indescribably alluring about her face. It was a listening face, sensitive, appealing, pure as moonlight.

"Mr. Fletcher, I thank you. Why you should be willing to sacrifice yourself for me, I cannot guess. My mother must have told you that I am blind."

Ambrose stared at her.

"Yes, Lady Sophia has told me."

He mumbled the words, unable to believe that those brown eyes of hers could not see.

Her lips moved again and her face looked troubled.

"It is wrong of me. It is all so strange. We are utter strangers; you cannot care—whether I am happy or miserable."

"I do care."

The mother looked at him sharply, for they were the first humanly impulsive words that she had heard him speak. She interposed.

"Parson John, we will proceed."

She rang a little silver bell that lay on the table. The parson spread his book; the door opened, and two old servants came into the room.

"Take hands."

Lady Malplaquet slipped a ring into Ambrose Fletcher's palm, and then went to her daughter and led her towards the bridegroom. Avice held out a hand gropingly. Ambrose took it. It trembled in his, and that quivering of her fingers sent a strange thrill through him.

Parson John's voice broke the silence. Avice's hand still trembled, till Ambrose Fletcher's fingers closed on it with a sudden impulse of tenderness. Then it lay still in his. A queer exultation leapt in him.

Then—it was over—done with; they were man and wife.

By Warwick Deeping

Sophia Percival kissed her daughter on the mouth, and then laid her hands on Ambrose Fletcher's shoulders.

"My son, whatever happens to you to-morrow—you have done a good deed to-night."

He answered her sadly.

"Madam, I have some pride left. This hand that I hold is too good for me."

Avice's fingers tightened on his.

"Husband, your voice is kind; it pleases me. I have no mind to be selfish; I will not seek to keep you near me. Why you have done this thing for my sake—I cannot say."

He bent his head, raised her hand, and kissed it.

"What I have done I have done," he said. "I shall never regret it."

Sophia Percival held up her hand.

"Listen!"

A bell was clanging somewhere in the silence of the house, and merging with it the hammering of a footman's cane upon a door.

Sophia Percival's face betrayed a defiant exultation.

"Gregory—go—let them in; bring them here, man. We are ready."

Ambrose Fletcher kept his hold of Avice's hand. Parson John stood with his back to the fireplace. Lady Malplaquet placed herself in the centre of the room.

Voices and laughter came from below. There were footsteps upon the stairs, the striking of the scabbard of a sword against a baluster. Then the servant Gregory appeared carrying a candle, and behind him Ambrose saw two gentlemen walking arm in arm. One of them was a very handsome, finely built man with a hooked nose and restless eyes; the other was the fat man in the purple coat who had helped to ruin him at Raffaelli's. His wig was awry; his face looked purple with wine.

"Hallo! what the deuce is all

this? Stand up, Poyser, stand up, man—on your own feet."

Sophia Percival made her husband a magnificent curtsy.

"My lord, your devoted wife and servant. You arrive at a happy moment. These two dear children have just been made man and wife."

Jordan Percival thrust the unsteady Poyser from him and walked into the middle of the room. He looked at his wife, he looked at Parson John, and then his eyes rested on Ambrose Fletcher and his daughter. His hand went to his sword.

"The girl is not of age!"

His wife curtsied again.

"My lord, I have the proof, safely hidden, and you know it. You would not listen to me, so I have forestalled you."

He went close to her, glaring in her face, but her eyes outstared his.

"You treacherous hag!"

He flung round and faced the parson.

"So it is you, old Venner! You have dared——"

Parson John nodded his head.

"I am content, sir, quite content with this night's work."

Poyser was leaning against the wall, fanning himself with a handkerchief, and grinning fatuously at the room at large. Jordan Percival glanced at him savagely, and then turned on Ambrose Fletcher.

"Well, my friend—and who are you?"

"My name is Fletcher, sir."

"Devil take it, but I do not know you from Adam! Some rat out of the "Fleet" bought for the occasion."

"No, sir, I am one of the Fletchers of Dorsetshire."

"The devil you are! And what the devil made you tie yourself to this blind screw of a wench? How much have they offered you?"

Then Ambrose Fletcher discovered himself. He had felt Avice wince.

The Blind Marriage

"I will trouble you, sir, to remember that your daughter is my wife. I have chosen to marry her of my own free will. If she is blind—she will be none the less dear to me for that."

Percival scoffed at him.

"The money will make up for the blindness, eh! She can buy herself a husband——"

Ambrose dropped his wife's hand and stepped forward. Some other man seemed to be speaking in him, not the mere country lad who had made a fool of himself in the London assembly rooms and gaming houses.

"My lord, I charge you to be careful. I know nothing of my wife's property. It may be the size of this room—for all I care. I throw the taunt back in your face, my lord. You have failed to sell your daughter. I would take her—here—as she stands, and thank God for it."

Sophia Percival clapped her hands.

"There speaks the true lover! Such words sound strange to you, my lord! Sir Robert Poyser there is like a whale out of water. It would be more seemly if you took him home and put him to bed."

Her husband gave her one look, and then turned his back on them all. He caught the fat man by the arm and dragged him towards the door.

Lady Malplaquet turned to the bride and bridegroom. She looked keenly at Ambrose Fletcher.

"Well, young man, you played your part handsomely. Avice, child, get you to bed. Mr. Fletcher and I have certain things to say to each other."

She spoke with an air of finality, but the girl kept hold of Ambrose Fletcher's hand. Her lips were quivering; her blind eyes were turned to his face.

"Mother, let me speak with my husband."

Sophia Percival seemed to hesitate. Then she shrugged her shoulders, beckoned to the parson, and they left Ambrose and his wife together.

For a moment neither of them spoke. There was a strained, questioning look on Avice's face; she had dropped his hand.

"Mr. Fletcher, not only am I blind, but all my soul is in the dark. Yet I can bear the truth. Why have you sacrificed yourself for my sake?"

He knew that those eyes of hers were blind, and yet he shirked them, and looked ashamed.

"It is not easy for me to tell the truth," he said; "things have happened so strangely. To-morrow, perhaps, I will tell you."

Her face was frank and calm.

"Perhaps I have no right to ask. You have saved me from that man, and I am your debtor. Of course, I know that you cannot love me."

He winced.

"Of that, I am not so sure. But, Avice, I have no heart to talk to you to-night. I think that of all men I am the most miserable; I will leave myself and my honour in your mother's hands. And so—good night."

She held out her hands with a sudden, wistful impulse.

"Oh, you will trust me to-morrow. If I can help, why keep me blind?"

He took her hands and kissed them.

"I thank you for that. A fool has been of some use to you, Avice. Good night, and God keep you."

He dropped her hands, crossed the room hurriedly, and opening the door, found Sophia Percival walking up and down a long and handsome gallery.

She beckoned.

"Come hither, my friend; the child has wonderfully sharp ears."

Her air of finality troubled him,

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for Ambrose Fletcher had come out of that room with a changing attitude towards life. And this tall and imperious woman remained like a figure of fate.

"Well, sir, you have behaved like a man of honour. My thanks are yours, if they are of any comfort to you at such a tragic crisis in your life. And yet I have one more thing to ask of you."

He looked at her anxiously.

"I would ask you, Mr. Fletcher, to try and keep secret what you are about to do. I cannot see that secrecy can make any difference to a man who has determined to take his own life. You see, it must not come to my husband's ears, for the girl's sake. If he knows her to be a widow, he will be ready to persecute her again."

Ambrose Fletcher felt a chill go through him. He had travelled a long way from the mood of two hours ago.

"Madam," he began, "two hours ago I was desperate——"

"Then let me implore you not to wait too long," she answered him. "I brought you here as a man who was determined to die. My whole plan was based on that."

Ambrose felt a choking in his throat, but these heartless words of hers stung him.

"Madam, I hope I shall not disappoint you. I will take measures to insure my body not being discovered. And I will wish you good-bye—and good night."

It was self-pity that spoke, and she knew it. The tragedy was changing to comedy; she was assured of that; nor did Ambrose Fletcher suspect that pity and laughter struggled behind her stern face.

The window of the bedroom in the house where Ambrose Fletcher lodged looked out over gardens and orchards towards a row of elms that

screened the beginnings of the open country. He sat at the open window till the dawn was near, a very miserable and baffled man, with the desire to live growing stronger and more clamorous each moment.

And yet what a pit of disaster was he in. Those gambling debts of his were like a quagmire into which all that he possessed had tumbled, and that monstrous fat man in purple stood on the edge thereof, brandishing a fistful of debts of honour. What irony; the very man whom he had cheated of a wife!

Avice's face haunted him, that soft face whose very blindness was like a lovely veil. He wanted to hear her voice again, and touch her hand. Surely she would pity him? Was she not the very essence of tenderness and pity? And she was his wife, a woman who had suddenly and in one night stirred the nascent manhood in him, given him a passionate desire to live.

The dawn came, a rare, golden dawn. Birds were singing in the gardens.

He grew desperate; it was impossible to die on such a morning in June. He let himself out of the house, and wandered away from the purlieu of the great city into the fields. The whole earth smelt of life and joy; the grass was long in the fields—lush and green and painted with flowers. Ambrose Fletcher threw himself down in the grass under a hedge. Life cried out in him; every fibre of him refused to die.

Sophia Percival was seated at her little French writing-table when a servant entered.

"Mr. Ambrose Fletcher to see your ladyship."

She smiled.

"I will see him, Gregory; show him in here."

She went on writing; the door had closed; someone was in the room,

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but she did not turn her head. The silence lasted for some seconds.

"Lady Sophia——"

She faced him with an air of astonishment.

"Good heavens, not dead yet!"

He looked haggard and unkempt.

"I cannot die, madam, I——"

"Not die! Why, last night it seemed so easy, and you were in such a hurry! What has happened?"

"I can't die. I want to live."

Suddenly her whole expression changed. Her eyes lit up, her face softened.

"Sit you down, son Ambrose, and tell me the whole tale. And you have had no breakfast?"

"No."

"That shall soon be mended. You shall eat here. Now for the confession."

He told her everything, how he had come to London, a young squire rather too sure of himself, how he had tried to play the dashing man about town, how London had fleeced him. And it was Poyser, the fat man in purple, who was to have married Avice, who held most of his signatures.

Lady Sophia let her laughter have its way.

"Oh, dear heart, what a comedy! Very well, so you want to live, son Ambrose? Have you another reason to give me?"

He looked at the floor.

"I think I am in love with my wife, that is all."

She went near and put her strong hands on his shoulders.

"Son Ambrose, all this may make a man of you. It will teach you to be careful, and to remember that a fool may hurt more hearts than a knave. Somehow I like you. I think you will be kind to Avice."

"But there is the old place, and mother——"

"Son Ambrose, I am a rich woman, and the man Poyser is never a man to refuse good money.

Besides, sir, you have married an heiress."

Ambrose looked ashamed.

"Oh, confound the money. I shall pay it back."

Then he looked her frankly in the face.

"What ought I to do, madam? I feel that I ought to go away for a while, be made to suffer. Life is becoming too kind and too easy."

She patted his shoulder.

"Make no mistake, young man, there is work enough for a man in making a good husband. You have won a treasure, though she is blind——"

"I think, madam, that is why I love her."

A servant appeared with a tray. He set it on one of the French tables and departed.

"Eat, my son, and then you may find Avice in the garden."

His hunger seemed far feebler than his desire to escape into the garden. His haste was commendable. Lady Sophia forgave it.

Ambrose found his wife sitting in a rose arbour at the end of the bowling green. She heard his footsteps on the gravel path, unfamiliar footsteps. Her face flushed.

"Who is it?"

"Avice."

She made room for him on the bench; he had taken her hand and was kissing it.

"You are not afraid of me, dear?"

"I was afraid you would not come back again. What a sacrifice you are making. And yet I'm not so helpless as you might think. I want you to tell me the truth, Ambrose."

He told it her, and somehow she found it easy to forgive.

"I can help you, Ambrose. We must always help each other."

And in later years the cynics said of their marriage that if all kind fools married blind wives the devil would lose half his business.

WARWICK DEEPING.

Story Teller
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The Saving of a Husband

By Warwiek Deeping

"The peasants crowded round them, and their eyes were the eyes of hungry beasts. One man snatched at Etoile as though he would have taken her roughly to him. She struck his hand aside, and turned to Haouart the Smith.

"Keep faith with me. Have I not given up the keys?"



ETOILE DE MAUCOURT stood at her window, and watched her husband cantering away along the white road between the poplars. She held her head high, and her eyes had a haughty, inward look. Poised between tenderness and scorn, she let her thoughts follow the white dust upon the road.

"Go, my good Denis," she said, "yes; go and throw yourself at the feet of that red-headed harpy, Dame Falconette! Into how many ditches must a man fall before he comes by wisdom? Because that image of falseness smiles at you, you think her kinder than your wife."

They had quarrelled that morning, and quarrelling was no new pastime to Denis de Maucourt and Etoile, his wife. Denis de Maucourt was a hot-head who rode everywhere at a gallop. He fell over himself in his hurry to be reckless, generous, a knight of adventure. Etoile had dark and steady eyes, a broad white forehead, and a proud mouth. They married each other in the thick of the English wars, Denis having caught up Etoile from under the very claws of a pack of plundering Welshmen, and carried her gallantly into Paradise. But Denis was more passionate and impetuous than his wife, and Etoile wiser and deeper souled than her husband.

These were the first days of the Jacquerie, when the peasants, mad-

dened by war and by misrule, rose against the lords and gentry, and plundered, ravished, burnt; and slew. Untellable things were done by them. They were brute beasts drunk with fury. But about Maucourt there had been no violence, and no terror in the shiver of the aspen leaves. Denis de Maucourt had scoffed at the wild tales a frightened pedlar had brought from the south.

Etoile had dreamed dreams.

"Do not ride out," she had said to him.

Denis had shrugged scornfully.

"What! A gentleman of France afraid of this scum from the pond? Wild gossip. I do not believe it."

Then they had quarrelled, though Etoile had had too much pride to taunt Denis with the truth. Dame Falconette of Fleury was spreading a net for this impetuous young man, and a wise wife, bearing the pain of patience, stifles the wild words that are but as wind to the torch of a man's wilfulness. This red-headed Falconette, with her sly, mature comeliness! Pah! She would not stoop to contend with her, if Denis chose to be a fool.

Yonder—beyond the meadows—Sir Denis de Maucourt made a spur of his own impatience.

"Tantrums, tantrums!" he said to himself. "These women try the edge of a man's soul."

Yet the pale preacher Shame pointed a long forefinger at him, and Denis's anger could not take the taunt unmoved. Flames of conscience started up under the feet

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of his desire, and though he tried to trample on them they would not be smothered.

Now Dame Falconette had a hunting lodge on the edge of Witch's Wood. It was a great, black-thatched, black-beamed house, half hidden by the oak trees, and with a stretch of grass before it. Denis de Maucourt's horse carried him thither like a thunderstorm. He found Dame Falconette seated on a red cloth spread on the grass before the house, a lute in her lap, and eating sweetmeats out of a silver bowl that her serving woman had set beside her.

She laughed up at Denis de Maucourt out of her sly brown eyes, and Messire Denis was an entire fool not to see how old she was despite her handmaid's cunning. Dame Falconette had the tongue of a priest. She knew how to twist life in and out, to soothe and to flatter, and talk over and round a young man's conscience.

"I never thought to see you again," she said.

Which was a lie, and Dame Falconette had the whole Book of Lies in her bosom.

Denis dismounted, and looped his bridle over the iron hook in the door post. Maugre his boasts and his quarrel with his wife, he had put on a hauberk and a light bassinet, and buckled his sword to his belt. A man might scoff at a woman's whims, but sometimes they were suggestive.

Dame Falconette's eyes glittered.

"So the news has reached Maucourt," she said.

"What news?"

She made room for him on the red cloth.

"That Legion has entered the bodies of our swine. They say the boors have risen near Beauvais, and that they have done terrible things."

"Idle gossip. They dare not show such insolence."

"But if it is true——"

She looked at him significantly, challenging the gallant, swaggering spirit that carried such a man as Denis de Maucourt into a woman's ambush.

"Are you afraid?" he asked her.

She dropped her eyes, and then glanced at him with sidelong slyness.

"Messire Denis de Maucourt will not suffer me to be afraid."

He rose to the challenge.

"By Our Lady, I would crave to use my sword on something more than rumours."

Dame Falconette applauded his spirit. She fed him with sweetmeats out of her silver bowl, and made good use of her restless eyes. Anon she chose to sing to him, striking the strings of her lute, and giving much leisure to admire a white hand and wrist. She knew how to hover with fluttering wings before stooping for her prey.

But Dame Falconette's song was snapped in twain, and the lute strings grew silent. A thin, black-eyed girl came running from among the oak trees, her face a white patch of terror.

"The peasants—the peasants!"

Denis was on his feet, his sword half drawn.

"Scythes and flails, and clubs. They are coming along the great ride."

Dame Falconette's face went white under its red bloom.

"Messire Denis, go—go and see——"

He started off and plunged in among the oak trees. Mistress and maid stood and looked at each other.

"Madame, it is death—and worse. Jehan is away, and the palfreys are unsaddled."

Falconette's eyes swept the girl's face, and rested on Denis's horse.

"How near——"

"By the white stone where the

ride branches. Oh, madame, Messire Denis can do nothing. They are too many——"

Falconette caught the girl by the wrist.

"Quick—we must take our chance. Three people cannot ride one horse. They will kill him."

Terror made the girl ready for treachery. Dame Falconette swept her away. They mounted Denis de Maucourt's horse, the mistress before, the girl behind. Falconette pricked the beast with a bodkin from her hair, and he galloped with them towards the meadows.

They were an arrow's flight away when Denis de Maucourt came running out of the wood with the face of a man who had looked into the eyes of death. He drew in and stood staring. Dame Falconette and her wench were galloping off with his horse, leaving him to be clubbed and torn in pieces by these scoundrel peasants.

Denis caught his breath. One grim moment of understanding showed him the true and the false, and the depth of his own folly. This woman had tricked him in sending him into the wood while she thieved his horse. He had been ready to fight for her, but she had sacrificed him and left him to shame and death.

He turned, wondering whether he should try to defend himself in the house, or take to the woods and hide. Fate and Dame Falconette denied him the choice, for men came running through the trees, short, scrubby men in smocks, men with fierce, gloating faces and hands that brandished clubs and bills and scythe blades lashed to poles. They howled and panted as they ran.

Denis stood stock still, stunned and astonished by the screaming ferocity of these men of the soil. Then the pride and valour of gentle birth flamed up in him. He sprang back towards the lodge, and set

himself within the doorway where the open-roofed hall within gave room for the play of his sword. His eyes glittered, and wrath breathed through his nostrils. He would show these peasants how a gentleman of France could fight.

The first man to reach the doorway was armed with a long knife. He put his head down and charged in like a bull, striking the air before him with the knife. Denis de Maucourt ran this madman through the body. A second and a third followed, the fleetest of foot, only to fall to Denis's sword. Those who straggled after looked at the three dead bodies and the live man with the sword, and faltered.

Denis mocked them.

"Curs! Bide there, and snap and snarl."

A black-chested giant, who had fallen behind in the running came pounding up. He swung a smith's hammer, and bellowed like an angry stag.

"It is Denis de Maucourt. Drag him down, drag him down."

The mob howled and charged for the doorway. Denis saw a tangle of wild faces, arms, legs, clubs and scythe blades jammed between the doorposts. He struck and struck again, but his sword broke against a holly-wood cudgel, and the peasants poured in and smothered him as a wave smothered a rock.

"Kill! Kill!"

"Stab the lordling."

"Ha, for St. Jacques!"

They quarrelled and scrambled over him like wolves over a carcase, each man trying to get in a blow as Denis de Maucourt writhed under their feet. Suddenly a big body came charging through the press, thrusting the smaller men aside.

"Let be, let be. Our bear's to be baited before we crack his skull."

It was Hacquart the Smith, the black-chested giant who had fallen behind in the running. He wore

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nothing but a coarse smock open at the chest and throat, and in his hand he carried his smith's hammer. Sweat ran from his face, trickled down his massive throat, and ran into the black mat of hair under the brown smock. His thick red lips grinned over blackened teeth.

Hacquart drove the men this way and that.

"Off, fools! Is it not Messire Denis de Maucourt whom we have caught? And will you waste good sport as though he were an ox?"

Denis sat up, dazed and bleeding. The peasants jeered and mocked at him. Hacquart the Smith chuckled.

"At Maucourt," he said, "there is a fine hind, the mate of this fat hart. Let us take him to Maucourt. We will make good sport there."

The peasants applauded.

"Hacquart is right."

"We will make the gentleman dance on faggots for the joy of his lady."

"To Maucourt! To Maucourt!"

Denis was hauled up, and his hands lashed behind him, some of the wretches amusing themselves by spitting in his face. They bundled him out into the sunlight, using feet, fists, and elbows, and mocking him with savage taunts and threats. Before leaving Witch's Wood they plundered Dame Falconette's lodge, brought the two palfreys from the stable, and then set fire to the place. Hacquart and another man, a long fellow with a crooked nose, mounted the palfreys and made Denis de Maucourt walk between them. In this fashion they set out for Maucourt, leaving Dame Falconette's house blazing among the oak trees.

Maucourt itself had been warned soon after Messire Denis had galloped off in a dudgeon. The gate was shut and the bridge raised in time to save the place from the treacherous hands of Denis de Maucourt's own peasants. Baulked in

trying to surprise the place, these rogues had hurried off to join a great company of "Jacks" who were said to be marching on Amiens. Etoile de Maucourt had two old men, a boy, and three women with her—an impotent garrison. There were four horses in the stable. She called these people to her, bade them take food, and the four horses, and make the best flight they could of it towards Meaux.

"We cannot hold Maucourt," she said. "The wretches will come and break in."

They besought her to accompany them, but she would not be persuaded.

"I shall tarry here till my lord returns. And if God has willed it that he should be taken by these devils, then he will come no more to Maucourt. Go. I am strong enough to raise the bridge and shut the gate after you have gone."

And since great fear was upon them, they commended her to God and the saints—and fled.

The sun was low in the west when Hacquart the Smith and his mob of peasants came within sight of Denis de Maucourt's castle. Etoile sat at her window, and saw dust rising upon the road. The evening sunlight played upon it as it rose like opalescent smoke between the poplar trees, and Etoile knew that such a dust cloud could not be raised by the hoofs of her husband's horse. Out of the haze came a glitter of scythe blades and a tossing of clubs. The blurred figures grew distinct, the wild faces of these men of the soil, men who would have slain the Christ had he appeared to them in clean raiment.

They shouted, howled and blew horns as they stormed up the road to the castle. Etoile stood very still, lusting for twenty good men-at-arms whom she could send to trample this rabble into the dust.

By Warwick Deeping

She saw the two leaders mounted on palfreys, and the figure that walked between them. Etoile's eyes told her that it was Denis, her husband.

For a moment she felt an utter emptiness at the heart, a cold panic that gripped her very thoughts and held them still. The coarse, gloating faces, the jigging, half-naked figures danced a dance of death before her in the sunlight and the dust. They were very close now, within thirty yards of the moat. She could see Denis's face, the fierce, death-defying scorn in it, and the way he walked, holding his head above the sweat and uncleanness of these yelling boors.

They shouted and blew their horns, and Etoile awoke out of her stupor. She left the tower room, and passing along the passage on the curtain wall, reached the platform of the gate house. A quick and desperate courage stirred in her, beating its wings to mount above the brutal exultation of the peasants.

When she showed herself on the battlements of the gate house, the men below abruptly ceased their shouting. For Etoile was no poor thing dressed to play a part. She was the great lady, set by nature high above the muddy tracks of these low-born lives. Some of the fine scorn of her presence struck down upon the crowd. They stared at her sullenly, like hungry beasts who were half afraid.

They were scorned, and they knew it—scorned by this woman who stood high above their uncouth ignorance and meanness. The snarling rage of the thing that is scorned leapt up in a burst of savage, gibbering fury. They howled foul words at the woman above them, shook their rude weapons, made obscene gestures.

Hacquart the Smith held up his hammer for silence. He looked at

Etoile, and his broad, greasy face was smeared by the sunlight.

"Open the gate, Dame Jezebel," he shouted; "we are the lords of the country."

Now neither Denis de Maucourt nor the peasants knew that Maucourt was undefended, and that not a live soul breathed within it, save Etoile. Denis was standing stiff and straight, a knot of wrinkles on his forehead, his lips pressed so tightly together that they looked pale. He gazed at his wife, thought of Dame Falconette, and marvelled at his own folly.

"Keep the gate shut."

Denis de Maucourt shouted the words before a rough hand could smite him in the mouth. Hacquart glowered round in anger.

"Silence, popinjay."

He turned and stared up at Etoile outlined against the yellow sky.

"Wench, unless the bridge is lowered and the gate opened, we will tie your man to a post and burn him before your eyes."

Etoile looked down upon their mocking faces. Denis was staring up at her with bleak, compelling eyes. She saw that he was about to speak.

"Etoile, I charge you—keep the gate shut. Let them do what they please with me."

He was buffeted and hustled to and fro, but his message had sped. Etoile stood and gazed upon the choice that God had given her. Pity, scorn, love and anger flamed together in her heart. She knew that these men of the soil would show no mercy, that ignominy and death would be her fate. But Denis had spoken bravely, and her love went out to him. Moreover, into her mind had flashed the faint gleam of a desperate hope.

She gazed at Hacquart and saw that he was the master beast.

"I parley for terms," she said to him.

The Saving of a Husband

He laughed.

"If we open the gate and surrender Maucourt, then shall be granted to me and my husband one night to make our peace with God."

The peasants clamoured, but Hacquart held up his hammer.

"It will save us blood," he said, "and to-night we can feast and drink and plunder, and keep our sport for the morning. Woman of Maucourt, let the gate be opened. We have no quarrel with the men who serve. I, Hacquart the Smith, will play the priest and shrive you."

As she looked down upon his evil face, a great fear of the man seized upon Etoile. But love and the faint cry of a forlorn hope carried her on. She took the keys, and descending to the gate, passed into the bridge chamber where the weights were worked. The bridge creaked down, and Etoile returned to the gate, and peered through the grille. Hacquart and his men were standing in a half-circle some thirty yards away, looking as though they half expected treachery and a rush of armed men when the gate was opened. One of them held a knife at Denis's throat, and Etoile's lips parted in a bitter smile. She slid the great bar aside, dropped the chains, and unlocking the gate, walked out on to the bridge.

For a moment the peasants stared at her in lowering astonishment. Her fine-edged courage was not to be howled down. Denis de Maucourt was biting his lips. He swayed slightly on his heels, shaken by a great desire to throw himself at this woman's feet, and pour out his shame and his homage before her.

Hacquart's round eyes glared in his greasy face.

"Where are your people?" he asked her.

"They fled two hours ago," she answered him. "Here are the keys I charge you—keep your word."

She flung the keys at Hacquart's feet, and going to Denis, kissed him upon the forehead.

"Do not fear for me—I can be brave," she said.

But the strained whiteness of her face showed how she loathed and feared all that might follow. Denis hung his head, and could not look at her. This love of hers was bitterer than death.

"May I burn in hell," he said, "for bringing this upon you."

The peasants crowded round them, and their eyes were the eyes of hungry beasts. One man snatched at Etoile as though he would have taken her roughly to him. She struck his hand aside, and turned to Hacquart the Smith.

"Keep faith with me. Have I not given up the keys?"

Her courage served her. Moreover, she had touched Hacquart's passions and his conceit.

"Off. I keep my word."

He waved the men back with his hammer.

"Here are the keys of Maucourt. In, good dogs, and lap up the wine and snap up the silver. Ha! St. Jacques!"

He threw them the keys, and the whole company went crowding and shouting across the bridge. Hacquart came and stood very close to Etoile, staring her in the face, and grinning.

"Come, madame; presently I must shrive you."

Night had fallen, and Denis de Maucourt lay bound in a corner of the hall, grinding his teeth and trying to pray. If ever a man's soul was tortured, it was the soul of Denis de Maucourt, who had made light of his wife's love. His manhood writhed and strove within him as he lay there helpless, thinking of the horror of the thing that might happen to Etoile.

The great hall was like a sty, with men wallowing amid the

rushes. The wine of Maucourt had done its work. Plunder, and food, and empty cups lay on the table, and under the benches men snored and slept. All the torches save one had burnt themselves out, and the torch that still flamed showed Hacquart the Smith seated in the dais chair, with Etoile on the bench beside him. He had a cup on his knee, and his hammer rested against the chair.

Denis had watched this man, but now his courage failed him, and he writhed himself over with his face to the wall. What an accursed fool he had been! If only God by some miracle would strike away these bonds! He wept in his wrath and in his impotence, whispering Etoile's name, wishing her dead, and himself dead with her.

Presently he mastered himself and lay listening. The hall seemed full of the breathing of men who slept, and Denis found himself wondering whether Hacquart the Smith would fall asleep. His body stiffened, and he lay with his head drawn back, staring at the wall. The light from the solitary torch threw a faint glow upon it, and upon the wall Denis saw a shadow moving. He held his breath and wondered. Something stirred the rushes near him. A hand touched his cheek and laid itself upon his mouth.

He understood, and thrilling to his very marrow, lay stiff and still.

A knife was at work cutting the thongs that bound him. Etoile's mouth breathed close to his ear.

"He is asleep. Come."

Denis de Maucourt felt his strength and his courage come back to him like life to a dead man. An exultant gratitude seized him. He rose slowly and cautiously, and

stood beside Etoile. She pressed the knife into his hand, and gave him one long look that Denis understood.

The torch was fluttering in its socket. Denis gripped his wife's wrist, and picking their way among the bodies of the drunken peasants, they reached the door of the hall. The courtyard lay empty before them, and Hacquart and his men, in their drunken recklessness, had left the great gate open and the bridge down. Etoile felt the straining of Denis's hand upon her wrist as they passed out across the bridge and saw the stars shining in a clear sky.

Neither of them spoke. Hand in hand they turned into the meadows, and ran for the black sanctuary of the woods. Not a sound followed them from Maucourt. The spirit of the Red Wine had worked for Etoile's honour. Hacquart the Smith still slept in the chair upon the dais.

They were on the edge of the wood, standing under a beech tree and looking back upon the castle. Etoile felt a spasm pass through Denis's body. He threw himself on his knees before her and kissed the feet under the hem of her green tunic.

"God has chastened a fool," he said. "Etoile, forgive!"

She stretched out her arms to him.

"Both wise folk and fools quarrel," she said, "but the wise folk forgive."

All night they went hand in hand, keeping to the fields and waste lands, and taking their guidance from the stars. Good luck watched over them, and brought them in safety to the good town of Meaux.

WARWICK DEEPING.





In the Days of the Terror

*A Revolution Story of a thrilling escape, and
of a brave man who stayed behind*

By
Warwick Deeping

BERTRAND DE ST. PIERRE galloped his horse across the park of Vilancourt, and drew rein in the shadow of one of the clusters of beech trees that were grouped in the valley below the château. It was a clear night, but with no moon shining, and the stars were thick overhead.

"Thunder, they are well lit up yonder! The candles are as thick as the stars."

He dismounted, tethered his horse to a tree, and stood staring at the château of Vilancourt, whose flèches and gables seemed to strike up towards the stars. The waist of the great house was girt with a belt of glittering lights. The place was a blaze of candles. It was as though Monsieur le Comte was giving one of those balls for which Vilancourt had been famous.

But Bertrand de St. Pierre's face looked stark and set. There would be no laughter at Vilancourt, no music, no stately ladies treading its polished floors.

"What does it mean?"

He spoke the words to himself in a whisper.

"Has Dubois come? Impossible! He had not left Breux two hours ago. The peasants, then? But all is silent. The wretches would not be so quiet."

He stood awhile listening, and throwing glances across the dim slopes of the park.

"Let us see what it means. If I fall into a trap, well—it will have been for Yvonne's sake."

Bertrand felt that his pistols were safe

in his belt as he moved out from the shadow of the beech trees towards the château. He avoided the road that ran straight towards the main entry where the great iron gates hung from massive pillars of stone. Bertrand de St. Pierre knew Vilancourt as though it were his own home, and reaching the wall of the garden, he walked along till he came to the wicket-gate that led into the garden.

He found himself in the dark bosket that sheltered the rose garden, and passing through it by a winding path, he came to a stairway that led to the formal garden. Here he paused abruptly, one hand on the stone rail of the stairway, his face turned towards the stars. From the château came the music of a harpsichord and the sound of a girl singing.

"It is Yvonne!"

He ran up the steps and between the fountains, statues, and clipped trees, and so came to the great terrace where the roadway swelled out into a gravelled space before the château. Bertrand saw that the doors were open. He entered, and stood wondering under the great glass chandelier that lit the hall. It was crowded with candles, and every candle was alight. Moreover, the great stairway was lit as for a state function, with every sconce carrying its torch of wax. Not a servant was to be seen. Nothing seemed to stir in the château, but from above came the music of the harpsichord and the sound of a girl's voice singing.

Bertrand crossed himself.

He climbed the stairs, seeing his white

face reflected in the mirrors; the glitter of candlelight was all about him. The great gallery was lit from end to end, and the double doors of the state salon stood open. He reached them, and paused abruptly on the threshold.

By the fireplace stood an oldish man dressed in a white satin coat, vest, and knee-breeches. His stockings were of white silk, the buckles of his shoes set with diamonds. He wore a powdered wig, a gold-hilted court sword, and a jewelled star over his heart. He looked very stately and unconcerned, his eyes downcast as he listened to the music.

The girl at the harpsichord was dressed in white, like her father, but her black hair was unpowdered. Her eyes looked very large and dark in her pale face, and as she lifted her head to sing her throat showed like a column of ivory. Her voice did not falter, nor did her fingers strike one false note.

These two—father and daughter—saw a young man, dressed as a sergeant of dragoons, stride into the salon. The music ceased suddenly. Monsieur le Comte did not move.

"It is I—Bertrand."

Yvonne sprang up with a sudden cry. "Bertrand! I thought—they—had come."

Bertrand crossed the room, and the candlelight shone in his eyes.

"Yvonne!"

He lifted her hand and kissed it, and then turned quickly to the Count.

"Sir, I am in time. Dubois is at Breux."

De Vilancourt smiled at him, a smile of affection and of pride.

"I always knew that you were a brave man, Bertrand. Dubois is at Breux. I know it. He is coming here to-night."

Bertrand spread his arms.

"Mon Dieu, then—why delay? There is time. I have a friend in a village by the sea—an old sergeant who is ill; he lent me his clothes. I have a boat ready."

De Vilancourt bowed to him, and then drew himself up.

"Good friend—I thank you. But—I will not run away from these dogs, scramble through hedges, and hide in woods. I am here—in my own house; my servants have fled; I myself lit these candles. I wait for Dubois and his sans-

culottes. I am an aristocrat. In my own house—like a gentleman of France—I wait for their coming."

"But, sir, the Convention! Your name—"

"Dubois has it. I have been warned. I am an old man, Bertrand. Let them come."

Bertrand turned to the daughter.

"But, Yvonne—"

She made him a curtsy.

"Bertrand, I thank you from my heart, but I stay with my father."

Bertrand de St. Pierre stood looking from one to the other. He was waiting for le Comte de Vilancourt to speak, but the aristocrat's face was the face of a statue.

"Monsieur, you wish this?"

"She is my daughter."

Bertrand gaped at him.

"But, monsieur, she can be saved."

Yvonne placed herself beside her father.

"I do not wish to be saved, Bertrand. I stay with my father; he will not send me away."

"Monsieur—think—consider."

He stretched out his hands.

"You are an old man; you yourself have said it."

De Vilancourt's face seemed overshadowed for a moment.

"My friend, she has chosen. The aristocrat in her has chosen. I have not asked her to set her pride beside mine."

"And you suffer her to choose—death!"

"I am proud of her pride."

Bertrand de St. Pierre's hands dropped. He was dumbfounded, speechless.

He turned suddenly and walked towards the doorway, his forehead knotted like the forehead of a man in pain. His right hand touched the stock of one of his pistols, gripped it, and then relaxed. A great spasm seemed to pass through him. He faltered, faced about, and his eyes blazed.

"Monsieur, I must speak! Mother of Heaven, I must speak!"

He did not look at Yvonne, but at her father, this white man with the face of ice.

"Monsieur, come with me into the gallery."

Yvonne swept in between them.

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"Bertrand, I have chosen. It is the self in you that seeks to tempt him——"

His passion carried him away.

"The self in me! Mon Dieu, am I afraid to die! That you should die proudly, splendidly, I would grant you that. It is not with you that I must speak, Yvonne."

He thrust out a hand with a powerful gesture, as though to grasp and to compel.

"Monsieur de Vilancourt, it is with you that I must speak. By all the noble blood that has been spilt, I charge you—hear me."

"What would you say to me?"

"The words that I have to speak are flames. Shall they burn—Yvonne? Come—to the gallery."

He turned and walked out through the doorway of the salon, leaving a silence of suspense behind him. No one moved in the great room; no footsteps followed him. Bertrand's hands went to his pistols.

Then he heard de Vilancourt's voice.

"Stay here, child."

"But—father!"

"Stay here."

Bertrand drew a deep breath. Footsteps crossed the room and came out into the gallery, and in a long mirror Bertrand saw the white figure of the Count reflected. He was following him.

Bertrand turned at the end of the gallery, where the broad oriel window gave a view across the park towards Breux. He folded his arms and looked intently at le Comte de Vilancourt.

"Yonder lies Breux, monsieur. Dubois will be on the way by now."

The old man's eyes were set in a stare. He carried himself proudly.

"Let him come!"

"Ah, let him come. Dubois—the infamous Dubois with the long red hair all smeared with scented grease. Mon Dieu, monsieur, shall he find Yvonne here!"

De Vilancourt threw a sudden, flashing glance at Bertrand.

"Yvonne is my daughter. This fellow Dubois——"

Bertrand flung out his arms with a hoarse cry.

"Monseieur, you know not Dubois. 'Let him come,' you say; 'Yvonne is my daughter.' I tell you I know Dubois.

See him with my eyes—long, lean, a fop, and a debauchee with that smeared red head of his and his lustful eyes. Mon Dieu, have you not heard what they say of Dubois? And you let Yvonne stay—to be pawed by this infamous beast!"

De Vilancourt stood rigid, his face as white as his coat.

"Monsieur Bertrand, do you taunt me!"

"Thunder, man, I will taunt you, if needs be, to save her from Dubois. Where is your heart? where is your pride, monsieur? Shall this white bird's wings be crushed——"

De Vilancourt's voice rang out.

"Enough! How do I know, sir, that what you say is the truth?"

"Judge, then. See here—these pistols. If Yvonne stays for Dubois to take her, then, by the soul of my mother, monsieur, I, her lover, will give her death."

De Vilancourt swayed as he stood. Then he took two steps forward, knees bent, hands outstretched, his eyes staring into Bertrand's eyes.

"Death—or—infamy?"

"I have said it, sir."

De Vilancourt flung up his arms and drew himself to his full height.

"She shall go—by the blood of the martyrs, she shall go."

Bertrand de St. Pierre stretched out his hands to him.

"My father, will you not go with her? My horse out there will carry two."

"And you?"

"I can take my chance."

De Vilancourt embraced him.

"No, no; I have chosen. I am an old man. And now——"

He turned to the window, and the words died in his mouth.

"Look!"

Away yonder in the blackness a crowd of lights were moving towards the château. They were torches carried by the peasants who followed Dubois from Breux—yellow flares that danced and flickered and licked the night with fiery tongues. One of the lattices stood open, and a murmur of many voices came up to the two men in the oriel.

"Dubois!"

"They make no secret of their coming."

"They know that the Comte de Vilancourt awaits them like a gentleman."

They heard Yvonne striking the notes of her harpsichord. Her father turned, gripping Bertrand's shoulder.

"Quick! They will be here in ten minutes. Yvonne must go."

She looked up calmly at the two men when they re-entered the salon, but her eyes fixed themselves upon her father's face. It was no longer cold and unconcerned, but eager, desperate; passionately afraid.

"Yvonne—go."

She started up, overturning the chair.

"Father, I will not go."

He raised a hand and pointed.

"Child, I command you to leave me. Dubois is in the park with torches."

"I care not for Dubois."

De Vilancourt glanced at Bertrand.

"Take her, my son—save her—by force."

"Bertrand, I dare you to touch me."

He moved towards her, speaking to De Vilancourt over his shoulder.

"A cloak, monsieur—something dark to wrap round her."

"Bertrand, I shall hate you!"

He stood there, looking at her with sad but determined eyes.

De Vilancourt had gone to his bedroom. He returned with a heavy riding-cloak fitted with a hood. He was breathless.

"They are at the gate. Take the other staircase, Bertrand, and go through the kitchen quarters into the fruit garden. There is a door in the wall opening on the park. Yvonne!"

She sprang away stretching out her hands.

"No, no; I will not go!"

"Child, I command you. Let me put this cloak about you."

"No, no; you suffered me to choose."

De Vilancourt appealed to Bertrand.

"Take her, monsieur; you are strong."

She tried to elude him, to thrust him off with her hands, but the love in Bertrand de St. Pierre was a fierce and desperate love; daring to overcome the strength of the thing it loved.

"Monsieur, the cloak."

She struggled in his arms.

"Bertrand, I hate you—I hate you!"

"Hate me, Yvonne; hate me with all your heart."

Between them they got the cloak round

her, though she tried to tear it off. De Vilancourt's face was a study in anguish.

"Quick—by this door."

He opened a door in the panelling, but stood back for fear that Yvonne should cling to him. Bertrand set his teeth. He knew where mercy lay, and that de Vilancourt was like a man upon a rack.

"Good-bye, child. It is my wish that you should go. Be gentle with her, Bertrand."

He thrust them through the doorway, and closed the door upon them.

Yvonne ceased struggling; she lay limp and relaxed in Bertrand's arms like one in a faint. Then, by the heaving of her bosom, he knew that she was weeping, the bitter and passionate tears of one whose sacred wishes have been outraged. But for the moment he had no time to think of all that it might mean to him and to her. A narrow gallery led to a staircase that was dark as a pit. He had to feel his way step by step down into the lower quarters of the château.

Would he be too late? Had Dubois surrounded the place? Would he have to use those pistols?

His arms tightened involuntarily about Yvonne.

If they escaped, would she ever forgive him?

Then he heard shouts, the shouts of the mob of Breux as they poured up the road towards the terrace. Yvonne also heard them, and shuddered.

"Bertrand—traitor!"

A light showed before him, and he found himself in the kitchen quarters; dim spaces and passages and doorways that baffled him. He felt a draught blowing, and went towards it, thanking God in his heart when he saw the faint outline of an open doorway before him and found himself in a small courtyard. All was silent here. The servants had fled, taking the horses with them.

Offices and stables were built round the courtyard, and Bertrand stood looking to right and left.

"Yvonne, show me the garden door."

"Never."

"It was your father's wish that I should save you."

"I have not asked to be saved."

He searched for himself since she

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would not help him, and the shouts of the mob grew louder and more sinister. Bertrand tried three doors before he struck the right one, and found himself among the espaliers and bushes of the fruit garden.

As he turned down one of the walks he had a view of the torch-flare on the terrace. He could see a swarm of dark figures moving; here and there a musket barrel glittered. There were women with the men, women whose voices were shrill and cruel.

"To Paris with de Vilancourt!"

"To the guillotine!"

"Vive Robespierre!"

"Vive Dubois!"

Bertrand hurried on. He felt Yvonne trembling in his arms.

"Oh—infamous—infamous—to leave him alone to die!"

"I offered him my horse, Yvonne. He would not take it."

"Would he have taken it? Is he not a Vilancourt?"

Bertrand came to the stone wall between the park and the garden, and he made his way along it, stopping now and again to listen. The shouts of the mob had a muffled sound, for Dubois and his following had entered the château.

Bertrand reached the door in the wall and found it open, just as he had left it. There was half a mile of the park to be covered, and though he was a strong man, and Yvonne slightly built, he began to feel her heavy in his arms.

"If I set you down, will you walk, Yvonne?"

"No. You have carried me away by force. I will do nothing to help you."

He braced himself, stepped through the doorway, and looked sharply to right and left. Not even a laggard was to be seen out yonder on the road. Bertrand seized his chance and ran.

Meanwhile, in the great salon, le Comte de Vilancourt stood with his back to the fireplace, a smile hovering about his mouth.

Le Comte de Vilancourt was still smiling when Dubois entered the salon. Behind this creature of the Convention marched a dozen grenadiers with their muskets on their shoulders, and behind the soldiers crowded the mob—peasants, workmen, all the rough canaille of Breux.

A sudden silence seized them as they stared at the white figure standing there so calmly. And then, as though his very calmness was so much scorn thrown in their faces, they began to jeer and howl, and shout threats and curses.

Dubois walked into the salon. He was the man, as Bertrand de St. Pierre had described him—lean, red-haired, with the beast rampant in his mouth and eyes.

He held up his hand for silence.

"Vilancourt, we are here."

The aristocrat smiled.

"You have brought all your curs to the hunt, sir. Have you any news for me?"

"You are my prisoner. The Convention needs you, and Madame la Guillotine."

"Indeed, sir—and nothing more?"

"You demand much, Vilancourt! These good citizens will burn your house for you."

"I am much obliged to them!"

And he burst out laughing.

They were astonished that he should laugh, and took it as a sign of his insolence and pride.

"How he will laugh, citizens, when his head falls into the basket!"

"Burn the house. Monsieur Dubois, you give us the house?"

"Yes, my children. You may take from it what you please."

He turned roughly on De Vilancourt.

"He laughs best who laughs last, sir."

De Vilancourt bowed to him.

"I am at your service, sir. I laugh because it is so easy for an old man to die—when God has answered his prayers. But you—you do not believe in God, Monsieur Dubois. That is a pity. You will not be able to laugh when the time comes for you to die."

Bertrand's heart was drumming under his ribs, and all the breath was out of him when he reached the thicket of beech trees where he had tethered his horse. He set Yvonne on her feet, and staggering against the trunk of a tree, clasped it with his arms.

Yvonne stood looking at him. The horse was tethered close by, and her heart still yearned towards Vilancourt, where her father stood facing the mob of Breux. She moved towards the horse, and began to fumble at the bridle.

"Yvonne!"

She turned and ran towards the distant château where the torches and candles made merry together.

Bertrand's breath had come back to him. He rushed after her, and caught her before she had gone fifty yards.

"Yvonne, are you mad!"

She struggled passionately to get free.

"Bertrand, I hate you! Let me go—let me go!"

Then he lied to her—such a lie as a strong man tells at times for the sake of someone's happiness.

"Yvonne, you will not find your father there. He has gone on the great journey."

She ceased struggling, and stood very still within his arms.

"Bertrand! Tell me the truth!"

"Would a de Vilancourt surrender to such a creature as Dubois! Your father had pistols on him."

She gave a sharp cry.

"He is dead, then—he is dead!"

She freed herself, and this time he let her go.

"Bertrand, I do not care whether I live or die."

"Then I shall choose for you, Yvonne. I will you to live."

She resisted him no further when he unfastened his horse and, mounting, stretched out his hands to her.

"Give me your hands, Yvonne, and put your foot on my foot."

He swung her up and seated her behind him.

"Hold fast to me. We have fifteen miles to ride before daybreak."

The beech woods were very still and black and eerie. The woodland ways were like narrow waterways running between high houses. Sometimes the stars were blotted out by the meeting of the branches overhead.

They rode in silence, Bertrand watching the track, conscious of the girl's arms holding to him. He wondered what was passing in her heart, whether she still hated him for carrying her off from Vilancourt.

The woods ceased, and they began to climb a moor that went in long heaves towards the north. Bertrand knew this country well; he could have followed the sheep-tracks that only the shepherds knew.

Suddenly he felt Yvonne's arms tighten about him.

"Ah!"

"What is it, Yvonne?"

"Look—the fire—over yonder!"

He half-turned his horse and reined in. Southwards, over the black woods, the sky was all aglow. Something was blazing over yonder, blazing like a red beacon built upon a hill.

It was the château of Vilancourt.

They watched it in silence for half a minute before Yvonne spoke.

"It is Vilancourt—my home." Her voice quivered. "It is well—it is well. Perhaps—he—set it on fire."

Bertrand murmured, "Perhaps."

She seemed fascinated by the distant fire, as though it stirred in her all manner of new emotions, new hopes and fears. Her consciousness found itself cut off, exiled from all the old life, thrown forward into the strangeness of the unknown. Vilancourt was going up in flames; France was an enemy's country; she herself was nothing but a penniless girl going forth into a strange land.

A great loneliness came over her, a hunger for love, a child's yearning for comfort. She realised for the first time that she was clinging to Bertrand, this man who loved her, and who was risking his life because of this same love. And she had cursed him, in the passion of her pride, and accused him of infamous selfishness.

"Bertrand."

He laid his hand gently on one of hers.

"Yes, Yvonne?"

"My father wished me to leave him?"

"Did he not plead with you?"

"Yes—yes. Bertrand, he may have wished it before you came. Was there some vanity in my love—some selfishness?"

He answered her gently.

"Yvonne, I loved you for your pride. Forgive the rough strength that had to conquer it."

She put one of her hands over his shoulder.

"Bertrand, be patient with me. I have no one left. Is it selfish to feel—that I must be loved—and loved fiercely?"

He drew her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Yvonne—I can give you that."

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Story-Teller
OCT 1920

By Warwick Deeping

“‘Don’t you know how beastly things are for her here. Half the old cats in the hotel licking their chops over a pretty woman’s supposed humiliation. They think she is consoling herself with the second best. Dear Heaven, what a situation!’”



JANET opened the shutters that the French maid had closed the night before, and stood face to face with the soft splendour of the southern dawn. The sea was a sheet of amethyst, the sky a deep crimson flecked with a few purple clouds, the great grey hills dark and sharp-edged against the sky.

Out of the sea rose the red sun—the sun of the old Greek world, the god in the chariot, magnificent and strong.

Janet slipped back into bed, and watched the sky change its colours.

“I wish I was as strong as that sun,” she thought.

The buoyancy and the eternal youth of the southern day poured into the room, and seemed to flow into her young body. She felt sleek, good, utterly at peace with herself and that beautiful world where the roses bloomed in February, and the oranges on the trees were little mimic suns. It was so very beautiful, this world, so satisfying, so soothing to a young woman whose life had become rather difficult.

Janet met the “family” at breakfast in the great glass *salle-à-manger*, built like a huge conservatory on the edge of a precipice. Down below on the road in the valley you saw men like ants, little puny things crawling along the white track. As usual, “the family” was cheerful—blatantly

cheerful; it fed on eggs and bacon, a gross habit in such a climate. But the Lustridges were gross people, with the grossness and cheerfulness of vulgar success. Janet belonged to them just as much as a soft mezzotint that has got itself mixed up with a crowd of “cubist” daubs may be said to belong to the company it is obliged to keep.

The Lustridges and their like were new to the Hôtel des Roches. It had received them politely, and with widely opened eyes, and a little philosophical shrug of the shoulders that said “*Voilà*—but it is the war.”

The old world and the new world met. There were two atmospheres, two points of view. In the old days the Hôtel des Roches had not been the home of the blatant beast. It was a little inaccessible. It remained inaccessible so far as some of its humans were concerned. Janet had sensed that at once—while the “family” had wallowed in its wine-bill and felt itself impressive. “Snobs—what!” Ma was not afraid of using her voice. If there were a few quiet and austere people who kept away from the family and its odour, the Lustridges were neither hurt nor discouraged. Nothing could hurt or discourage the Lustridges. They were too successful, too stupid. A butcher’s shop full of good red meat is not to be put out of countenance by a volume of spring poems.

“Coming to Monte to-day, Sis?”

“No—I’m not,” said Janet, eating her rolls and coffee while the

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family dealt with its bacon and eggs.

"Not feeling well to-day, my dear?"

"Not very."

Mrs. Lustridge picked a splodge of marmalade from her blouse, using a knife.

"Why don't you go with Gus and Wally? You can have the car. Your pa won't want it; we're going to sit and listen to the band."

"I'm going for a walk," said Janet, "to look for violets."

"You'd much better go and look for a young man," said her mother truculently; "you wouldn't be so moody."

Pa Lustridge appeared suddenly from his coffee cup, like a walrus rising from the sea. He was just like a walrus—smooth, good-natured, rather helpless even in his success.

"You do what you like, my dear."

Janet gave him a quick, soft look. She had a fondness for her father, feeling him to be something of a fellow victim, a good-natured, homely soul, with streaks of sensibility running through the raw meat. He was not responsible for the "family's" eruption into the social scheme. Ma Lustridge, Gus, Wally and Constance had erected their "Hôtel Splendide" on the foundations of John Lustridge's little country pub.

Janet's one passion was to escape. She had tried so hard to be proud of the "family," to appreciate its solid, eupeptic, blatant worth, and the struggle had ended in humiliation. She had escaped during the war by serving as a nurse in England and France. She had tried to escape a second time, and had broken down in the attempt to spend herself on welfare work in the East End. The "family" had claimed her again, and the "family" was growing just a little "fed up" with Janet. She was "queer," "finicky"; she gave herself "airs"—at least, that was what Constance called her sister's sensitive reserve.

If the "family" found Janet difficult, Janet found the "family" impossible.

"She wants a husband and a couple of kids."

At the end of all her discussions of Janet's temperament Mrs. Lustridge always prescribed matrimony.

Old Lustridge would wipe his moustache and look uncomfortable.

"She doesn't belong to our back garden—not her. She's a kedge, like my father."

"That old fool who stuffed birds! Well, she worries me, always makes me feel I've got on the wrong dress. Now, Connie's different; Connie's got some go. There's nothing uncomfortable about Connie. There won't be any trouble about getting her married; it's the jolly girls who go off."

Janet had finished her coffee and rolls, and she walked across the *salle-à-manger* towards the door opening on to the garden. A brown man in a brown suit—the man who sat alone at the little table in the corner, and had an eternal book propped against the carafe—looked up at her with a suggestion of veiled interest. Janet's eyes met his for a moment, and then lifted with a little flash of fierce shyness. The brown man was a Mr. Melliush, who came from London, and his age was as vague as his origin. Probably he was forty. He went out hill climbing every day, and spent the evenings writing in his bedroom. He seemed to make a point of ignoring the human element in the Hôtel des Roches, and the Hôtel des Roches ignored him in turn. Mrs. Le Breton was the only woman to whom he troubled to speak.

This Mrs. Le Breton was sitting on one of the green seats under the mimosa trees at the end of the terrace. She smiled at Janet, and beckoned with her book. Mrs. Le Breton studied people, and she had been studying Janet Lustridge, this dark, thin girl, who looked as

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though some hidden fire were consuming her young body.

"Are you walking to-day?"

Janet went and sat on the seat beside Catharine Le Breton. They had struck up an acquaintanceship in that world of sunshine and atrophied spinsters, of people who had money to spend, and no youth to enjoy it.

"Only a little walk."

"That's the beauty of this place; you have only to go round the corner, and you have your bit of sunny wall and your brown lizard, your mountain and your sea."

"You get away from material things," said Janet; "the cake-shops and the casino—and all that. Beauty never bores one, it seems to me, you know."

"And it doesn't ask for money," said Mrs. Le Breton.

The brown man came out and stood hesitating, and looking at the two women on the seat. Hesitation did not suit him, for there was no hesitation in his eyes and mouth. Then he strolled away to a seat under the palms; he limped slightly on his right foot when he walked.

"Have you heard the news?"

Janet was sitting with eyes half closed, breathing in the scent of the mimosa.

"No."

"Mr. Henry Lambert arrives here to-day."

"Henry Lambert? The name's familiar."

"My dear, it is a household word. One of the celebrities of this new movie age."

"You don't mean the cinema man?"

"Yes, the all highest hero—the great white sahib—the star who's always a gentleman, and generally an earl. I am piqued."

"Are there any heroes? There used to be when I was in France."

"They have gone into mufti, my dear; that's all. Besides, civil heroism is not the same."

The "family" arrived in the garden, and at the noise of its coming

Janet arose and fled. Wally and Gus were doing a fox-trot down the path between the rose hedges. It was youth, just irrepressible youth; but somehow these young men seemed to have set life to the blare of a Jazz band. They did not mean to offend, and the Hôtel des Roches shrugged its shoulders.

The brown man glanced up, and walked across to Mrs. Le Breton's seat.

"Good morning, Mr. Melliush."

She gave him a mischievous, shrewd look.

"Why didn't you join us just now?"

"Because I did not know you had eyes in the back of your head."

"So you did not feel challenged. Most unheroic of heroes!"

"Be quiet," he said. "I wish to goodness I——"

Catharine Le Breton patted the seat.

"Sit down. The new rich have driven my wild bird away. How did that Buff Orpington ever manage to hatch her?"

Melliush sat down. He was frowning.

"Somehow, I think it's a tragedy," he said.

"What—the family?"

"There's nothing tragic about the family. Is the Majestic at Brighton a tragedy? I was thinking of the occasion when I saw that girl before."

"Yes—you told me. It's rather a fine thing, courage."

"They had smashed one ward, you know, another hut was on fire. There were we, a dozen of us, tied up with broken thighs, and the Boche dropping hell round the place. She stood in the middle of the ward, like a white flame that trembles. Some colonel man shouted to her: 'Nurse, clear out; go and lie down, please.' Go? Not she. She was frightened to death; I know the feeling; and she stood there through the whole raid, smiling round at us, a little white smile. I'm not a religious man;

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Kate, but I felt I could say my prayers to that girl."

"Why don't you?" she thought, "for that's what is in your heart, you dear silly! But I don't think you know it."

Aloud, she said:

"That precious family thinks her hysterical. The old mother scolds, the sister sneers, the brothers patronize. The old father is the only one who seems to understand that there is another sort of fineness in the girl. I rather like that Old Bill of a father. She wants rescuing, you know."

"Well, why don't you do it?" he said, with abrupt grimness.

She smiled.

"Do soldiers always expect to have an orderly?" she asked.

He gave her a quick, keen glance, got up then, and walked away.

Janet had escaped. She was climbing the grey mule path that went up through the vineyards and olive-groves, like a path that led up to heaven. Birds twittered. Down below there on one of the terraces an old Frenchwoman was cutting grass for her rabbits.

"It is something to have rabbits," said Janet.

She looked up at the pinewoods on the mountain slopes, those great grey masses of silence cleaving the blue of the sky. How beautiful the world was, how good the lives of these peasants who lived so simply on these hills.

Yet she was unhappy in the midst of this great picture of life. She wanted to escape, to escape from people to whom money meant everything. How grossly and blatantly rich they were. And yet, how could they help being what they were? Eggs and bacon and champagne, food and drink, clothes, vulgar noise, display! It was their view of life, their way of expressing and enjoying life—that was all.

And Janet asked for spiritual things. Even the subtilized sex in her cried out for a comrade. She

was one of those women who ask for a hero.

The great white sahib appeared that evening. He was a tall man, with fine blue eyes, a splendid head, a rock of a jaw, and the smile of a shop-walker. You felt that he was ready to play Rupert of Hentzau, or any other hero, at a minute's notice. He was a very perfect gentleman, with black braid down the seams of his dress trousers, a white waistcoat and a St. James's manner. All the women looked at him, especially the unmarried women of certain age. He was a fine figure of a man. Unmarried women in their lean and autumn years like to look at a strapping fellow, even though he happens to be a waiter.

Lambert looked at the women. He was a man who lived upon the admiration of women. His romantic and gentlemanly impressiveness as a lover had given him his cinema halo, and an immense success. He looked at Constance Lustridge, and found her too fluffy and obvious, and also too wide awake. He looked at Janet, and looked at her again. That dark girl was provocative. She was difficult. Lambert had grown tired of the obvious and easy women—women who were ready to rub round his feet like cats.

Before the evening was over Lambert was talking to Janet. He was an adept at managing such affairs. He drifted into the smoking-room and smoked a cigar with the men, made himself pleasant, followed them when they flowed towards their womenfolk in the lounge or the salon, attached himself with easy and charming friendliness to the particular family group—and the thing was done.

"I'm here for my health, you know," he told Janet.

He had eaten a superb dinner.

"Art takes it out of one. The trouble begins when you take your work seriously."

He always struck the note of ap-

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peal. Women like it. It introduces the personal touch—the pleasant suggestion that the particular woman is of more significance than her sisters.

Janet was puzzled. Also she was lonely. Those dark eyes of hers watched unconsciously for the coming of youthful delights.

Her window was alight with a virginal and sensitive flame. The brown man had begun to interest her a little before the coming of the white sahib; she had a feeling that she had seen him before somewhere, and that he too was lonely. But Henry Lambert erected a stage and held it. He put Mr. Melliush and all the other men into the stalls; the white sahib insisted on a crowd of spectators.

During the days that followed he piped that note of appeal to Janet. She was a wild bird, with dark, elusive eyes—the sort of woman whom Lambert wanted to overpower and to kiss. He began to make love to her, but it was his male vanity that made love. He liked to think that women's hearts were sore because of him.

Melliush saw it all, and still seemed to hesitate. He could not imagine a man making an amusement of Janet. He thought the fellow serious, and the brown man had a streak of shyness.

One day he met them on the mule path to Castellar. Lambert was talking with immense earnestness; Janet had the face of a girl who listened and watched.

"You see, I have an ideal picture palace! Rotten words, aren't they? But I see the bigger things beyond the cheap stuff they give the public."

Melliush went past them with a set face, and a slight lift of the cap. Janet gave him a faint smile.

"Dull person, that," said Lambert. "Typical English money-machine."

Janet had nothing to say about Melliush. Nor could she make up her mind about the white sahib.

"You believe in showing people beautiful things?"

"That's it—beautiful emotions—ideals—real human life. There's a great future in the film. At present it's degraded, vulgarized. I mean to make it something better."

He talked with fire in his eyes, and yet—Janet wondered. She had let herself come near loving him, but some fastidious and critical part of her still held back. Was he her man of ideals?—her strong soul pushing silently up the steep of life—a cleanser, a vitalizer, a healer of sick souls?

"Life is nothing without an ideal," she said.

"Say, rather, life is nothing without love."

She had let herself go out alone with him, and she did not realize the significance of the adventure until the "family" enlightened her. Sarah Lustridge approved of Lambert; the boys thought him a "topping chap"; it was old Lustridge who caused the trouble. He did not like Lambert, and he said so—but not to Janet. Old Lustridge had some sense.

"What's that fellow after, Mother? He's a bit too much of the polite swell."

"Fudge!" said his wife. "He was taken with Janet that very first night. I hope to goodness she gets off with him."

The hotel had grown interested in the romance, and the affair of Janet's heart was in every old woman's work bag. They amused themselves by pulling it to pieces. Strangely merciless are the fingers of those withered women upon whom the pollen of love and of life has never fallen.

The brown man caught shreds of the gossip. It stuck to his soul like the bits of thread the old women drop from their fancy-work. He could talk to nobody about it—not even to Catharine Le Breton, though he was conscious of the "Well, what now?" in her eyes.

And suddenly he ceased to hesi-

tate. He walked into the smoking-room one evening, sat down by old Lustridge, and began to talk. They got on quite well together, especially when the brown man told Old Bill of that incident of the bombed hospital in France.

"Lor', but she never told us that. And you was there?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't the girl remember you?"

"I haven't asked her. You see, I was only there two days."

"Well, why don't you ask her?"

"I will," said Melliush.

He had began his cutting in, and began it at a critical moment in the affair.

He talked to Janet for half an hour next morning on the terrace, and it seemed to him that she was restless, a little bewildered, puzzled by her own heart. Lambert was there in the background—a Lambert who was being kept waiting, a man who wanted the sensual thing after days of playing to the girl's soul. He was chatting to the latest arrival, a rather sensational widow, with tawny hair and eyes the colour of jade.

Janet broke away, yet she left Melliush with the feeling that she did not want to go. There was a crisis before her, something from which she shrank, an ordeal tentatively foreseen, though the temper of it was vague and clouded. She did not know whether she loved this man. For the life of her she could not say the yea or nay to her own heart. She was mute, waiting for a voice—the voice of an ideal.

Melliush saw them go off.

And he saw them return.

They came back separately, a good hour apart. The brown man was reading under the old olive tree near the well, when he saw Janet come in through the gateway that opened in the mule path. It was like the gateway of a castle, with high and overshadowed walls, and she stood there a moment in her pale-blue jumper and white skirt, as though the return cost her

an effort. She made him think again of a trembling flower, a flame that had been blown slantwise and trembled by some wind. Her courage was in her two gripped hands. He felt that something had happened—that she had something to face.

Melliush's blood ran hot.

"Had it happened?"

She went in, disappeared, walking as though she wished to escape the eyes of the old women.

Melliush waited.

Lambert's return was less sensitive, and less subtle. He swung in, lighting a pipe, biting so hard at the stem that his jaw muscles stood out. He had a baulked look. His eyes were just a little furtive.

"You cad!" said the brown man to himself.

But for all that he was held on the edge of a most unbearable suspense. He did not know what had happened. He would not know until he saw them together.

Janet came down to dinner with a shrinking that refused to shrink. The "family" hurt her that night. She was raw; she had had the soft, virginal skin rubbed from her soul. There were more chafings to follow.

Her mother eyed her as a farmer's wife might eye a cow. Wally was in one of his facetious moods—moods that were buoyantly vulgar. Old Lustridge alone sensed his child's pain.

Lambert talked with easy loudness to his neighbour at the next table. He went into the lounge after dinner and began to sparkle with the sensational widow. Old Lustridge had armed Janet out into the garden.

"You 'ave got a headache, my dear," he said.

"Yes, Dad," she agreed.

"You go to bed. I'll bring you some of that there asp'rin of your ma's."

She went, kissing him with sudden emotion. There was something that she could not tell him—something that she would never tell him.

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But somehow old Lustridge understood.

Going in from the soft glare of the moon he saw the white sahib talking to the widow, and Old Bill looked at him like a blue-eyed bull.

"Been playin' with my little gal, have you," said those eyes. "Wish I was young and had you down Stepney way."

Melluish was there too, behind a book and a cup of coffee. He had had moments of savage elation, pity, wrath. So she had stood up to the mock hero, as she had stood up to those German bombs! The white flame of her had not gone out.

He caught Old Lustridge presently in a corner of the smoking-room, an Old Lustridge who sucked a cigar and stared, vaguely conscious of a crowd of old women—old women who perhaps were more merciless in a hotel than in a London slum. Tongues! Hang them! That was what Old Lustridge felt.

Melluish sat down by him.

"Your daughter's tired to-night," he said.

"What the devil's that to you?" quoth the eyes of Old Bill.

"I wish you would let me make up a party one day—mules, you know—I mean, we'd ride on mules. Mrs. Le Breton would go, and you and your daughter."

"Oh, me and my daughter," said Old Lustridge, in a meditative sort of way. "Janet, you mean?"

"Yes—Janet."

Old Lustridge offered him a cigar. It was the only bit of eloquence he could command.

Now Janet's ordeal began on the morrow. A woman cannot explain such things as had happened somewhere on the grey mule path through the olives. She holds her tongue, and the world makes a sort of jigsaw of her silence. In this case Mr. Lambert's behaviour was the centre-piece of the picture. The old women took it and worked out the puzzle. They tittered a little, were maliciously wise, but the old

women were not the worst part of Janet's humiliation.

The white sahib had gone to the widow, and yet he did it like the cinema hero he was. He just drifted in her direction, with an air of inevitable romanticism, putting himself in no place where Janet could snub him. He eliminated Janet with a fine, forgetful gesture. The old women adore such a stage-play. They chuckle, they abuse the man, but in their hearts they love him for having hurt a pretty woman.

And the "family" blew scorn. Any sort of failure—the sex included—was a thing to be treated with derision. It was in the atmosphere—this family scorn. Janet had failed. Vulgar people never suspect a spiritual triumph.

"Finicky little fool," said her mother.

Whereat Old Bill came near behaving like the primitive stevedore with a boot.

"Shut up, drat you! or I'll—"

"John," said the wife, "John, remember you're a gentleman."

John went forth and bought his girl an armful of carnations. They were red, but better than bad language.

Meanwhile the brown man came more and more into the picture. He seemed to expand, to grow bigger, and the hotel began to notice him. He made himself talk to the "family," and the family patronized him a little; he was forty, and on the edge of buffedness in the eyes of Wally and Gus. The hotel had agreed that he was "just something in the city." If Janet was to be consoled, she was to be consoled by a shadow. The great white sahib still held the stage.

Janet's favourite haunt was the monastery terrace where the cypresses and the mimosa showed green and gold against the battered whiteness of the walls. Melluish followed her there, openly and like a soldier going to his post, and the real sahib sat on the old stone parapet beside her and looked at the

mountains and the sea. He talked to her of impersonal things, feeling her sensitive shyness of the male beast, since that other man had shocked her fastidious pride.

They talked of France, the new age that was upon them, the aftermath of the war, the ideals that would matter. In a few days she lost her shyness of the brown man.

"Life is so difficult—now," she told him. "During the war one helped—one felt part of the great necessity. And now I just sit in the sun and feel a parasite. It's not that I want to rush about and put the world in order, but I want to help."

And then he began to make love to her, gently, rather shyly, yet with the freshness of a boy. He was very young still, for youth stays with men who have lived cleanly.

The hotel was amused.

"I suppose she will console herself," said Miss Bromby, who wrote books. "Any sort of husband, my dear. Pique, you know."

And Catharine Le Breton laughed, and laughed like a sunny morning.

She waylaid Melliush in the garden.

"My dear Stephen, I am getting up a fancy dress dance here."

"Well, what of it?"

"It is my particular bit of mischief—and it all depends on you."

"How?"

"I think you told me you had some khaki with you."

"Did I?"

"Don't prevaricate! That confounded ceremony in Paris, you know—all the ribbons and tabs and stars and things complete."

"Good Heavens, Kate, I couldn't wear that here!"

"Not for one little evening?"

"But she doesn't know. I ought to have told her."

"That's the charm of it. You haven't the cinema soul, Stephen. *Voilà*—what a *dénouement*! Oh, priceless! Do let me be your stage manager!"

"My dear Kate——"

"Think," she said. "No, I'm serious. Don't you know how beastly things are for her here. Half the old cats in the hotel licking their chops over a pretty woman's supposed humiliation. They think she is consoling herself with the second best. Dear heaven, what a situation! Let me explain it, Steve, or I'll never speak to you again. Don't you see what it would mean to her—what a crushing retort? And she—she would not have to utter a word."

The brown man thought a moment.

"Yes, on one condition—that I ask her first."

"As Mr. Melliush?"

"Yes—just that."

He asked her that very evening, walking on the monastery terrace by the light of the moon. He seemed to grow bigger as he walked there. He did not try to touch her; the man in him was in his voice and his eyes.

"Janet, I love you. I want you, dear. I think you and I could make life very good."

It was not heroic, but just the simple tenderness of a true man speaking from his heart. She was touched.

"I'm not very strong, you know."

"Well, I shall take care of you."

"Then, there are my people."

She was a shrinking yet appealing flame in the moonlight. Melliush touched her gently, tentatively.

"I think I love you," she said; "I don't know why."

"That is good enough for me."

And very gently he kissed her hair.

The Hôtel des Roches accepted that engagement with a shrug of mild cynicism. It regarded it as a compromise on Janet's part; there was no thrill of romance in the affair; Mr. Lambert's intrigue with the sensational widow held the screen like an exciting "serial."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Catharine Le

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Breton's fancy-dress dance had set everyone planning new costumes. The sensational widow—being a provocative person, saw herself as Eve in a dress of red and yellow vine leaves. Lambert was to be "Monsieur Beaucaire." Old Lustridge had ideas on John Bull. His wife thought of appearing as Queen Victoria.

Janet was to appear as "Dusk," in a dress of violet crape, and one silver star in her hair.

It was Lambert who met the brown man walking slowly down-stairs on his way to the salon where the "characters" were to assemble. The white sahib saw the humour of the thing. He went and told the widow.

"I've just seen Mr. Smith of London. Guess what his dress is?"

"Oh, a bath-bun, or Westminster Abbey."

"No; a full-blown lieut.-general, and oceans of ribbon."

"How sweet! And how do you like my vine leaves?"

"Absolutely it."

The brown man was a little late. He walked into the salon with an air of complete detachment, looked round for Janet, and saw her standing beside Catharine Le Breton.

"I must apologize for being late," he said.

She looked at him, vaguely puzzled. That uniform of his—those red tabs and ribbons seemed, somehow, to belong to the man.

"Rather ridiculous," said one.

"Yes—and bad form."

Someone rang a bell. Catharine Le Breton held up her fan.

"Ladies and gentlemen — one moment, please."

"I think I ought to introduce to you—someone—who is not masquerading here to-night. The real hero has been in fancy dress all these weeks."

She smiled round at them with the soft and charming audacity of the woman of the world.

"You see—I think none of us

would wish to be under a wrong impression. Our great man has consented to come out of his shell."

"Oh, hurry up!" said the brown man, in a broad aside.

She laughed.

"May I introduce to you all the one person who is not masquerading, and who is wearing his own clothes—General Cavendish. And now—the management asks us to go into dinner."

The Hôtel des Roches had lost itself for the moment. It gaped—as a crowd gapes. For General Stephen Cavendish had been the central and heroic figure in one of the most heroic episodes of the war. He stood there, looking rather annoyed, but the hotel saw him smile as he turned to Janet.

"You will forgive me?"

He swept her away through the crowd—past the blue gooseberry eyes of Gus and Wally Lustridge and the astonished feathers of the Buff Orpington. Janet did not speak till they were in the great corridor, and free of the crowd.

"What have I to forgive? The fact that you are—a real hero?"

"Oh, my dear, if people insisted on giving me all the honour that belonged to a lot of poor lads—who died. This bit of ribbon—"

She touched it with one finger.

"What a great man you are. I know those fine men never grudged it you. Wait. May I kiss that dear old daddy of mine?"

"You, exquisite, sweet soul!" he said.

They waited for Old Lustridge at the end of the corridor, and saw him coming rather like a bemused bull amid a herd of cows.

Janet kissed him.

"Dear old Daddy."

He put out a fat fist to Cavendish, and Cavendish gripped it.

"Like a sort of stage-play!" he gulped.

"No, better than that, Mr. Lustridge," said Catharine Le Breton, coming up behind him; "it's life."

WARWICK DEEPING.

Story Teller

May 1915
Guess

Prose

Benjamin Comes Back

By Warwick Deeping

"For a week Benjamin haunted the town, merciless, unanswerable, a plain challenge to his manhood. And one by one they went away recruited by a man whose grim eloquence lay in his eyes."

BENJAMIN sat on the steps of the furlough office, his kit-bag between his knees, his great-coat serving as a cushion. Benjamin had spent the winter in the trenches, and had been sent back to England with a smashed shoulder, two frost-bitten toes, and a kind of ferocious curiosity as to what was happening at home.

"Lord! think of them guns going it only sixty miles away! And to see the motor-buses running along the road down there, and the kids playing on the beach! I've had enough of this hospital; I want to get out and see things."

A freckled, bony and facetious Scotsman answered him from the doorway.

"All on twenty sheelings, my lad. Five months o' mud and a month in the blue breeches, and a grateful country starts ye out on seven days' furlough and gives ye one pound—exactly."

Benjamin growled.

"Oh, confound it!"

He glanced irritably over his shoulder at the crowd of men waiting in the passage.

"I'll miss that bally train! Waitin', waitin', always waitin'. What a game!

"Do you remember the day you volunteered, Billy?" he continued.

"Sure."

"Flags and cigarettes and cheers. Well, we've done our bit; and in

a month we'll be back again, blooming—noble volunteers."

"D'yer want to go back, Ben?"

"I'd rather go than not."

His eyes had a stern look. They were the eyes of a man who had faced death, the eyes of a man who had suffered. His lean brown face had almost an ascetic expression; the mouth was ferociously blunt and frank. War wipes the slouching, selfish hypocrisies and all the slosh and humbug out of a man's life.

His eyes brightened suddenly. A smile that had a mysterious tenderness softened his mouth.

"I'll get there some time to-night, anyway. The old place won't 'ave run away. . . . Do blue-bells grow your way, Billy?"

"I can't say as they do—in 'Ounslow."

"An' the fruit trees all pink and white, and the grass growin' long in the fields, and the ol' cuckoo callin'?"

"And the girls smilin'?"

"You bet! I guess most of the boys 'ave gone—got recruited. Beef steak pudding to-night, and yer own bed, Billy, yer own bed! I seem to have slep' in slush for centuries, but I'm not gousin'—not me."

Benjamin drew his money and caught his train. He was one of a party that raced down-hill to the station, like so many boys out of school.

His pipe went out and he forgot to relight it. His nose remained

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within three inches of the glass of the window. He was awed, exultant, strangely and solemnly happy.

"It's worth looking at, ain't it?"

He addressed a sallow, flap-cheeked "commercial" who sat opposite him.

"What?"

"Why, that there—England."

The "commercial" had dined and was lethargic. He saw so many men in khaki; green fields bored him; and he had no imagination.

"Rotten wet winter we've had. . . . Like to look at the daily paper?"

Benjamin's blue eyes gave him a keen, steel bright, yet slightly puzzled stare.

"Thanks; not me."

He resumed his gloating over the green landscape, and the merciless sincerity of the soldier wit in him coined an apt phrase, "Bloomin' bed-bug, ain't the apple blossom better than rotten dailies?"

So Benjamin came to Brockenbridge, his native town, just as the birds were singing vespers and the west was turning to gold. He was in a state of excitement and of exultation. He had come from a world of great happenings, a man who had escaped death, a man who had seen what other people had only read about.

"Hallo, Dumphy!"

He fell upon the fat and familiar figure of the Brockenbridge porter.

"How's everybody?"

"Much as usual. Back on leave, eh?"

"I've been in France."

"Oh, 'ave yer?"

Dumphy looked at him dully, quite unimpressed, and then went on down the train shouting the name of the station. Benjamin's home-coming did not strike him as being anything sensational. People

went away and came back again; Dumphy had experienced such oscillations for twenty years.

Benjamin shouldered his kit-bag and took a look up and down the platform, as though unwilling to be convinced that some particular person whom he had expected was not there.

"Didn't I send 'er a postcard?"

He felt vaguely aggrieved, and this tendency translated itself into an expressive reality when a young man who was trundling a milk-can noisily up the platform rudely suggested that he might move.

Benjamin's chin rose in the air. His nostrils dilated; his eyes had an unpleasant glint in them.

"Think I'm going to move for you and your ruddy milk-can, Jim Bates?"

"Bit sleepy, old pal?"

"What's the matter with you? Got a vein in your leg? What about your khaki?"

But Bates vanished out of the range of such questions, clattering that can of his as though trundling a can was the one thing that mattered.

Benjamin started for home. His way lay up past the almshouses, across the green, and round by Fetter Lane to the gate opening into the park. Brockenbridge was a little black town outlined against the yellow sky. It smelt sweet of the spring. Birds were singing in the high elms about the church, and when once you had got on the sunlit side of them the old houses looked red and mellow and benignant. The gardens were full of wallflowers and tulips, and the scent of them made Benjamin want to sing.

"Hallo, Mary! Hallo, Mr. Grummidge! What 'o! but the old place looks fine."

He travelled homewards, his brown face bright in the sunlight, dispensing greetings and hand-

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shakes. For a while he forgot old Dumphy and Jim Bates. The people he met happened to be old men, women and children.

The main street of Brockenbridge provided Benjamin with his first serious surprise. A young man in grey tweeds came sauntering towards him. He was a sleek but rather slouching young man wearing a soft hat and smoking a cigarette with an air of casual detachment.

His eyes met Benjamin's, and then looked away again with sudden obtuseness.

Benjamin paused, but the man with the cigarette edged round him.

"Had a good time, Ben?"

Good time indeed! And while Benjamin was preparing to explain things the man with the cigarette made haste to stroll on.

Next he caught sight of young Plumridge poking that fuzzy fair head of his out of Mrs. Parsons', the ironmonger's shop. Something seemed to happen to Plumridge; he disappeared, slunk inside with unexplainable abruptness. For three seasons he and Benjamin had played football together.

Outside Kidson's garage two mechanics were tinkering at a car. They did not discover Benjamin till he was close upon them, and there was no escape.

"Hallo, Ben!"

"Who'd 'ave thought of seeing you 'ere?"

They almost fawned on him with a forced geniality that could not hide the sulky unfriendliness in their eyes.

But Benjamin's face had ceased to shine. It had a thoughtful, judging look, with a slight pucker between the eyebrows and a curt hardness about the mouth.

He watched them a moment, beating his right heel on the pavement and saying nothing; his

silence and his watching eyes made the other fellows clumsy.

"We've got 'em beat, Ben, for certain, ain't we?"

"Who?"

"The Germans."

"Devil a bit of it! And who's we?"

"Why, the lot of us—business as usual, keeping trade goin', what?"

An immense scorn made itself the master of Benjamin's soul.

"Business as usual be——"

That was all he said. He did not want to quarrel with people on his first night home.

Benjamin found his father at work in the garden on the edge of the wood. Old Brett was leather-faced and laconic. He came down the path, grinning paternally.

"Hallo, Ben, boy!"

They shook hands, hard and long.

"Well, I'm proud of ye. Aunt Jane's getting supper. I've been working late; plenty to do in these times."

Benjamin did not go outside the garden gate again that night. He and his father sat on the seat under the old white rose beside the porch, smoked their pipes and talked. The afterglow had faded; there were white mists in the valleys; the stars blinked up above.

"It's fine, dad, real fine. The smell o' them wallflowers comes over me, all strange like. What a winter we've 'ad!"

His face seemed to grow bleak in the dusk.

"Where's Harry Clay, dad?"

"J'ined the hartillery."

"I knew Harry would go. And Jack Veitch?"

"Yeomanry."

"Jack was always a right 'un. And Billy Merchant?"

"'E's a Kitchener."

"Good Billy. But the rest of them down there in Brockenbridge

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—what's wrong? They all looked sulky at me, down their noses. 'Aven't you 'ad recruiting meetings?"

"Sure—plenty."

"And they 'aven't gone?"

"Don't want to."

Benjamin sat up so that the seat cracked.

"What! They let us chaps stew in that ruddy mud, and aren't coming out to do their bit?"

He got up and walked up and down the brick path.

"Lord, it's enough to make the soul of a dog sick! And the chaps out there counted on the pals at home. Why, what's Brockenbridge doin'? Ugh, the slackers! Good heavens!"

He sat down again with a sudden thoughtful air. When he spoke again his voice sounded solemn, almost tragic.

"Say, dad, it ain't like this everywhere, surely?"

"Can't tell. I don't travel about, Ben."

"If it is, as sure as blazes we are going to be beat. They ought to see those ruddy ruins in Flanders. And England all green and quiet like and full of the smell of the spring."

He seemed saddened, depressed, incredulous. His home-coming was not proving so exultant as he had imagined.

Benjamin celebrated the event by sleeping till nine o'clock next morning. Old Brett had gone to work, but Aunt Jane was bustling about, and there was a smell of fried bacon in the air. Benjamin dressed and shaved at his leisure, and stared at nothing with those stern blue eyes of his.

Aunt Jane gave him his breakfast, but he was laconic and nothing of a romancer.

"Going out, Ben?"

"Don't know. Father left any jobs that want doing?"

"Jobs? You don't want to be working?"

"I ain't so sure."

"There's that bit of fence wants mending down by the old plum tree."

"That will suit me A1."

So, instead of displaying himself to the public, Benjamin spent the morning mending a broken fence and thinking about a certain post card that appeared to have miscarried.

It was early closing day at Brockenbridge. Benjamin smartened himself up after dinner, put on his puttees with exceptional neatness, tilted his cap, and tucked his cane under his arm. There was a particular corner of the old town that lured him romantically. The particular cottage was built of stud and plaster; its thatch swept low over the windows; two clipped yews grew in the front garden.

But when Benjamin came in view of that cottage he discovered a civilian leaning his elbows on the gate and tapping one of the rails with an ash stick. The civilian was a full-eyed, full-figured young man, dressed in his Sunday clothes, new tie, new brown boots, new felt hat. He had a cocky, complacent look, and he appeared to be waiting for someone with an air of triumphant serenity.

"'Allo, Brett, back again?"

Benjamin had brought up within two yards of the garden gate. He stood there, rapping his leg with his stick, a man trying to size up a surprising situation, and with no friendly look in those eyes of his.

"Back before you've gone, fat Albert."

The civilian sneered.

"Not me—for a soldier! I'm not so fat in the head either. Let the fools as made the war fight the war."

A bleak look came over Benjamin's face.

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"You dashed skunk!" he said.

The man on the other side of the gate laughed mockingly.

"Got it on the brain—all of you. Think it's all fine and showy."

The cottage door opened and a girl appeared. There was a certain flauntingness about her, and the bright colours of her hat and dress showed up against the white plaster of the cottage. She had one of those pale, smoothly firm, selfishly rounded faces, out of which a pair of hard, dark eyes looked boldly at the world.

"Hallo, Ben!"

She regarded him challengingly, without a trace of embarrassment.

"Trying the recruiting game on Bert, are you? You leave him alone, he belongs to me."

The civilian sniggered.

"That's so. We're going to be married next month, my boy."

Benjamin said nothing. He just stood and stared at them both with a comprehensive and broadening scorn. Thoughts passed very swiftly through his mind; memories flashed on him. He saw the muddy roads in Flanders, the dreary fields, the rain soaking down, the grey-ness of it all, those water-logged trenches, the bodies of men whose brown clothes were stained all red. He remembered how he and his pals had talked of the people at home. He had had visions of this girl waiting for him, honouring him for playing the man out yonder.

War is a bitter and a fierce refiner. Benjamin's eyes saw more deeply into the realities of life. He beheld a plump, garish, overdressed young woman staring at him with shallow insolence. The wrath in his heart lost its taint of egotism. He wondered what he had seen in Sally Price.

"You're not sendin' 'im out then, Sally?"

"Not me. Soldiers ain't in my line. Bert's earning good money."

Benjamin was looking beyond them, gazing at heroic, bloody, tragic things painted by memory on the white walls of the cottage.

"I'd rather be a born coward than you, Albert Scales."

"Who's a coward?"

"I'm not calling you one. I'm wondering what we chaps were fighting for all the winter, holding the Huns off Calais and going through a hell of mud and beastliness. What were we doing it for? To save fat rotters like you, skunks that stayed at home and sniggered over it and called us fools."

He nodded contemptuously.

"Take care of him, Sally. Mind he don't get hurt by an old hen running up against him. Them motors, too, are dangerous things."

The two at the gate broke into mean, snarling laughter as he walked off.

"Ben's a bit upset."

"No brass band at the station, I suppose!"

Benjamin strolled through Brock-enbridge with the air of a fighting dog who had no wish to be meddled with. He was becoming conscious of a savage sense of injustice, nor was his mood lightened by the sight of half a dozen young men and girls starting out on bicycles. By "The George" he walked up against young Pyecraft, and young Pyecraft reddened, grinned at him sulkily, and made off.

A great bitterness broke loose in him. He turned sharply into a lane that plunged down through orchards towards the river meadows. He had seen enough of Brockenbridge; he wanted to be alone, to think things out.

Benjamin settled himself on a gate under the greenness of a great hawthorn tree. Old Jock Miller's cottage was just beyond the hedge on his left, and its apple trees thrust their pink-and-white flowered tops against the blue. Someone was

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working in the garden behind him; Benjamin heard the clinking of a hoe, but the identity of the worker did not concern him, and he did not trouble to look round.

"Why, it's Ben Brett, sure-ly!"

Benjamin twisted round.

"Hallo——!"

They stared at each other, the girl with the hoe over her shoulder and the soldier on furlough. She was just a slip of a woman, with a mass of brown hair, bright eyes, and a quick colour.

"Why, it's Rose Miller." He added. "How you've grown!"

She smiled up at him.

"Well, I've had my hair up a year. Suppose you hadn't noticed."

Benjamin answered with a meditative "No."

But he was noticing her now and wondering why he had carried no vivid memory of Rose Miller with him to the wars. He liked the sunlight on her, the warm, healthy, workmanlike look of her skin. And her eyes were honest.

"Been gardening, have you?"

"Since Tom went I do what I can. That half-acre's mine now."

"You dug it yourself?"

"Why not? Somehow it made me feel I was helping with the war."

Benjamin's eyes brightened.

"That's good. The old place ain't so rotten as I thought. It was making a sick man of me half an hour ago."

He swung himself off the gate, and they stood side by side, resting their elbows on the top bar. Benjamin's face had grown grave again.

"What's the matter with Brock-enbridge, Rose?"

"The young men, you mean?"

"That's it."

"I'm ashamed o' the place."

He glanced at her sharply.

"So you're feeling it. Lor', but it's enough to make a man run

around with a bayonet. I've been through the winter in the trenches, Rose. I tell you we were that cold and sick and weary of the mess and beastliness of it that we only kept our hearts up by thinking of the folks at home. And then to come back and find these young swine going about and shirking the job. We thought as every fit man at home would be gettin' into khaki."

One of her hands made an impulsive movement towards him and then drew back.

"It's a shame, Ben, a vile shame. I wonder they dare face you."

He laughed fiercely.

"Rum, isn't it. They sort of hate me; I can see it in their eyes. They'd have been happier if I'd been blown to blazes and not come back to trouble their fat consciences. I reckon I shall break loose."

"Tell them the truth?"

"That's it."

"Do it, Ben. You're the man that Brockenbridge wants."

He stared moodily for a moment at the opposite hedgerow, visualising all the slackness of this little town and hating it. But a new presence was making itself felt. His home-coming seemed less of a failure than it had seemed.

"Say, Rose, are you going to work all day?"

They looked at each other, but with mutual pleasure.

"Maybe I'm not."

"Come up and have tea at our cottage. Aunt Jane's at home."

"I like your Aunt Jane, Ben."

"Do you?"

"Well—yes."

"Then you'd like to come?"

"Yes."

"Right-oh!"

"But I must go and make myself look decent."

Ben glanced at her with approval.

"I hadn't found anything to quarrel with. Fact is, I was thinking——"

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Her colour rose quickly.

"You wait here while I put on my hat."

"I'll sit on the gate."

"I won't be ten minutes."

She was half an hour, but Benjamin did not quarrel with the lengthiness of her "ten minutes," nor with the results of her getting ready. He thought that he had seen nothing pleasanter than that simple white dress of hers with its edging of pink ribbon at the throat.

She caught his entranced look and smiled through a sudden coquettish coyness.

"I say, you look just like a bit of apple blossom."

"Do I?"

"Just as white and clean. Lord! and when one thinks of them trenches, and the stuff we called clothes! You're just a bit of the sweet green country, Rose."

Neither of them betrayed any immediate desire to take the direct road to the Bretts' cottage. The walk developed, expanded, absorbed new atmospheres and new revelations. They wandered down by the river, crossed it by the mill bridge, and loitered there awhile watching the water and each other's reflections in it. The bluebells in Marly Wood appeared to fascinate Benjamin. He wanted to pick primroses. He exulted in everything with a primitive and wholesome joy.

"Seem to have known you for years, Rose, somehow."

She looked at him with a sudden glimmer of the eyes.

"I used to think about you, Ben, out there."

"Lord! you didn't, did you?"

"I did."

He seemed the victim of a sudden immense wonder. He clutched his cane hard and swallowed something in his throat.

"Well, I'm blowed! I wonder

if that's why I came and—well, never mind. It's good to be here, Rose; it's just fine; I'll never forget this afternoon—never."

There was no premeditation on her part, but her hand was near his and he took it. They were just two young things whom nature had filled with a sudden delight in each other.

Aunt Jane was sitting inside the cottage door, patching a shirt, when Benjamin returned.

"What about tea, aunt?"

He was just a little embarrassed, but it was a triumphant embarrassment.

Aunt Jane dropped the shirt, stood up and stared at them.

"Well, I'm blessed!"

There was relief in her astonishment, jubilation. An extraordinary partiality of her own was being honoured almost miraculously.

She kissed Rose with enthusiasm.

"Ben always was a lad o' sense."

Benjamin grew silent and preoccupied during tea; his consciousness was being attacked by two warring currents of thought. His whole interest in life promised to get itself absorbed by Rose Miller and her white dress. It delighted him to watch her, to see that quick colour of hers mount up, to tell himself that she was the freshest and most womanly thing in Brock-enbridge. Yet that stern soldier sense of his refused to be smothered. He was thinking, too, of the men in France, and of the men who were pretending that they were needed at home.

There was a sheltered seat under the yew in the corner where the faggots were piled. This seat gave glimpses of old Brett's borders full of wallflowers, tulips, forget-me-nots and polyanthuses. Benjamin lit his pipe and, biting hard at the stem, confronted duty and pleasure.

"Suppose I'll be going back before long."

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And then he discovered an unexpected spirit of comradeship in Rose Miller. He had gone on to explain that the thought of the slackers at home filled him with savage impatience. It was spoiling his holiday.

"Why should they spoil your holiday, Ben? It's you who should be spoiling their peace of mind."

He had not viewed the question quite so impressively.

"Think so, Rose?"

"Of course. You've been wounded. Why should you have to go out again while these chaps stay at home? It isn't fair on anybody, on you—or on—well—anybody."

He let his pipe go out while he became deeply interested in her reservations.

"Who's anybody?"

"Why, your father and Aunt Jane, and——"

"And someone else?"

"Perhaps."

They were holding hands again.

"Well, I'm going anyway, Rose. I'll be proud to go and do my bit—for you."

"Will you?"

"Of course."

"Then I want to see those other chaps shifted. You ought to do it, Ben; you ought to shame them into going."

"Perhaps I shall," he said.

A fiery, battle-red sunset showed in the west as Benjamin trudged back towards Brockenbridge Green after seeing Rose Miller home. The fire of the Lord seemed to descend upon him. The plain soldier became a fierce rhapsodist and a seer.

"Lord, what a country to fight for! Ain't our women worth a drop of blood?"

He plumped right upon a scattered crowd of men arguing about the state of Europe outside Brockenbridge post office. Jack Halliday,

the blacksmith, was giving his views on what Sir John French should do.

Benjamin never quite knew how he began with that crowd. He found himself talking fiercely to men who listened with an air of sulky depression.

"What right have you to jaw, you who haven't slept out of your beds? Why don't you—do—something?"

The blacksmith muttered that it was no business of Benjamin's.

"No business of mine?"

He gathered himself together, got a grip of his scorn, and very quietly described the life they had led out there in the trenches. He threw grim facts in their faces. He was a man who had made good, a man who knew.

"That's what it's like out there. Yes, I'm not talking newspaper tosh. And we've been through hell for you chaps, while you stand and jaw in the pubs."

He said no more, did not stay to argue, but stalked off home, chin up, shoulders squared, a lord of scorn.

And thus it was that Brockenbridge lost nine-tenths of its young men. For a week Benjamin haunted the town, merciless, unanswerable, a plain challenge to its manhood. And one by one they went away, recruited by a man whose grim eloquence lay in his eyes.

"You've done it, Ben."

They were standing on the mill bridge watching the water.

"The chaps are all right. They'll make good, sweetheart."

"I'm rare proud."

"So am I," he said, with an arm over her shoulders. "My bit of apple blossom's the best in the land."

WARWICK DEEPING.

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AKA THE DESPATCH RIDER in newspapers

How a woman's sympathy saved a man who thought himself a failure

By Warwick Deeping

THE road ran along the bottom of a wooded valley that was spread here and there with stretches of meadowland, and dotted with farms. A stream threw an occasional silver loop towards the road and then vanished again into the woods or beyond the meadows.

Dennison's eyes were glued to the road in front of him. It was a narrow road, rutty and irregular, a road to be treated with grim respect by a dispatch rider going at forty miles an hour. Moreover, all manner of desperate wreckage was to be found cumbering it, dead horses, and dead men, a transport lorry, with one wheel smashed, half in and half out of a ditch, here and there a spiked helmet or a rifle, or some bloody relic left behind in the rush of a retreat.

Dennison rode with his eyes screwed up, and his mouth shut tight. His face looked thin and pinched and hungry.

He whizzed by a line of brown figures lying on the grass at the edge of the road. Farther on a patrol admonished him with fixed bayonets, and he pulled up, with feet scraping along the road.

"All right. Straight on for Sanderson's division? Darned hurry. Get there somehow. Life and death dispatch."

He spoke jerkily, using few words. A lean sergeant with bloodshot eyes nodded, and pointed with his rifle.

"Straight ahead. You'll find more of our chaps farther on."

Guns were firing over yonder, but Dennison had grown used to the sound of guns. The uproar had become like the noise of London traffic, a sound that went on and on and lost itself in familiarity. The valley widened out into a flat, cultivated plain with rows of poplars lining the roads and streams. Some of the trees had been smashed by shell fire, and their splintered stumps stood up like ragged ends of torn limbs.

Dennison passed more troops lying

under cover. A battery stood waiting behind some sheds and half-burnt haystacks.

Then quite suddenly on rounding a wood of poplars he came into the zone of fire. spurts of brown earth were being knocked up out of the fields; he could see shells curving in their flight; the racket was devilish. And yet it seemed a blind and senseless bombardment. He could see nothing to be fired at. It was as though the Germans were bombarding the empty fields.

He blanched a bit; his mouth seemed to twist all askew, and his eyes narrowed. Two brown figures were crouching in a ditch and peering over the top of a bank. Dennison slowed up and hailed them, but they could not hear him for the din. He had to leave his machine and join them in the ditch.

"Sanderson's division; important dispatch, lot of Germans coming up on the flank. Which way?"

One of the Tommies was chewing the end of a cigarette. It remained stuck to his lower lip when he spoke.

"See that hill there with the lump on it?"

"Yes."

"Sanderson's lot's there. Take the left-hand road just fifty yards farther on. Bit hot, ain't it?"

Dennison climbed out of the ditch, and his face went a shade whiter. A strange feeling of emptiness seized him, and his heart seemed to have softened and to have risen up into his throat. For a volunteer dispatch rider who had been sitting on an office stool a month ago the immediate prospect was not all joy.

He got back to his machine, set his teeth, looked into the face of the storm that was sweeping the fields in front of him. He heard the whining of a shell coming nearer and nearer; he could see the thing, a black dot in the air, and he stood fascinated, gripping the handles of his machine. The shell struck the trunk of a big poplar about thirty yards in front

of him; there was a crash, and the tree came down and blocked the road.

Dennison stared at it. He found himself saying things in a kind of confidential whisper:

"I must get on. Make a dash for it, a dash for it. Won't do to loaf about. But of all the savage rot——"

He compelled himself to move forward, conscious that he was on the point of losing his nerve. He wheeled his machine forward, lifted it over the fallen tree, and hesitated.

There was another of those infernal shells coming. He could hear its menacing, dolorous scream. And suddenly he rushed his machine forward; the engine started, and he vaulted into the saddle. A desperate desire to get through and have done with the business had seized him, and he put his head down, and let the machine race. The second shell burst like a huge Japanese cracker in the field to the left of the road.

He fancied he heard someone shouting behind him, but he was going at fifty miles an hour, and it did not strike him that the shout had any personal meaning. He had got to get to that hill over there, that hill with the lump on it. The road to the left.

He looked wistfully ahead. Where the dickens was that road that turned off to the left? He was whizzing straight forward into the thickening, detonating madness of that shell fire. There were machine guns too; he knew the particular hammering they made. What the devil were they firing at? He could not see a living soul.

Confound that other road! The Tommy had said fifty yards, but Tommy's ideas were vague on occasions. He couldn't have missed it, surely, when he was trying to get a glimpse of that second shell! Then he remembered that someone had shouted.

His face seemed to grow more haggard. He slowed up, wobbled, came to a halt. He had better go back and see whether he had missed that road.

There was another shell coming. He turned his machine, and started off with that dolorous, maddening scream coming nearer and nearer. Instinctively he bent low over the handlebars. The thing seemed right over him.

Crash!

Something had happened. He seemed to be slipping and slipping, into infinite vague darkness, and then the darkness closed over him, and that was the end.

In the hospital they called him the "silent Englishman." He just lay there with a thin and vacant face, the left sleeve of his shirt pinned across his chest, his head a mass of bandages. He could speak French, and speak it fairly fluently—Sister T  r  se had discovered that—but he seemed to have no desire to talk; nothing roused him; he lay and stared at the opposite wall.

Once a Zouave in the bed next to him saw Dennison fingering that empty sleeve with a puzzled and wondering air. Then tears came into his eyes; he hid his face in the pillow.

"Ah—le pauvre!"

They were very kind to him, these French nurses, and these wounded Frenchmen, but he looked at them with the eyes of one who was half asleep.

The Zouave would tap his forehead significantly.

"He dreams. That shell sent him to sleep."

Then beds were wanted; the wounded who could be moved were taken away, and put in a train that steamed away westward towards the sunset. And Dennison found himself once again with Englishmen—cheery, irrepressible Tommies, who yarned and gossiped and sang as the spirit moved them.

They were a scratch lot—a gunner, two infantrymen, an Army Service sergeant, and a couple of lancers. And they were jovially kind to Dennison, made him comfortable in a corner, and expected him to confide in them, which he did not. For Dennison was of a more sensitive fibre than these stronger and lustier fellows. He was very weak just then both in body and soul.

They asked him how he had come by his wounds, and he told them that he had volunteered as a motor cyclist, and been hit by a shell during the German retreat from Meaux. Then he closed his eyes, and curled himself up in his corner. His reticence puzzled them, but the sergeant gave a shrewd and kindly shake of the head. "The poor devil's had it badly," was what he intended to say; "let him alone." And they let him alone,

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for Thomas has all the instincts of a gentleman.

But they talked, and Dennison had to listen. They thought him asleep, but his brain was morbidly and fantastically wakeful.

One of the infantrymen was telling his tale.

"I was in Sanderson's lot. It weren't half hell, I can tell you; but we were doing fine, knocking the Sausages over,

"Something went wrong with the works. A chap in the Downshires told me a bloomin' dispatch rider took the wrong road, and got shot. All I know is we never got no dispatch, leastways, the General said nothin' to me about it!"

One of the lancers showed temper.

"That's it. That's what I've said all along. Bringing over a lot of 'nuts' on motor-bikes, and givin' them important orders. I don't question their pluck——"



He was whizzing straight forward into the thickening, detonating madness of that shell fire

when they got in on our flank, a bally crowd of them. Things looked a bit squiffy; we had to fall back for awhile, and we got it hot doing it. That's when Captain Bigby was killed, had his head blown clean off, and only married a month before the war. He was a plucky devil."

The sergeant waxed critical.

"But how did the Sausages get you on the flank? Oughtn't to have happened?"

The sergeant jerked a thumb in Dennison's direction, and the lancer coughed and dried up.

They went on yarning, but Dennison did not listen to them any longer. Ever since he had recovered consciousness a dull edge of pain had been pressing upon him, but that infantryman's words had given to his thoughts a sudden merciless keenness. It was he who had blundered, and his blunder had cost many men their lives.

"Blasted civilian!" That was what the lancer might have called him.

He huddled himself in his corner, and a kind of horror possessed him. His nerve had gone; trivialities became enormities; he was down in the slime of his own self-scorn.

Of course he was responsible! He had missed that turning, missed it while he was in a funk, and trying to get a glimpse of one of those whining shells. If he had kept his eyes on the road he would never have made such an abominable mess of his dispatch carrying. He had ridden right into the German fire.

Good God, if these men knew! He had lost an arm. What of that? He deserved it. He deserved to be dead. He wished that he was dead. Hundreds of fellows killed and wounded because he had funked for a moment, and thought of his own skin when he ought to have had his eyes glued to the road!

His shame and his self-despair were abysmal. He lost all sense of proportion, and never consented to confess that a man may blunder and not be disgraced. The shock of all that he had passed through was still upon him.

He found a hand on his shoulder.

"Hallo, old pal, what's wrong?"

He opened his eyes and looked into the face of the sergeant. It was a kind face, full of concern. And then he realised that he was shuddering, shaking like a man in the thick of a cold fit when malaria is upon him.

"Oh, nothing——"

"Lor', you were shakin' the seat. Feel cold?"

"A little."

Someone had a bottle of cognac. It was passed along, and Dennison was made to drink. Then one of the gunners offered an overcoat. The sergeant tucked Dennison up in it.

"Hold up, old pal. You'll be in a good warm bed in no time."

Dennison thanked them and closed his eyes. He had to bite his tongue to keep himself from bursting into tears.

That train journey seemed as though it would never end. They crawled and crawled, and stopped at innumerable stations where people crowded to give them fruit and cigarettes. Dennison pretended to be asleep. At one station the sergeant prodded him gently.

"Here, old pal, take a look at the lady; it will do you good."

The carriage door was open, and a French girl stood there with a flat basket full of apples and cakes and sweets. She was pretty and enthusiastic and compassionate.

"Ah, mes amis, take, take, for we love you."

She looked across at Dennison, and his gloomy and starved face moved her.

"Le brave Anglais!"

She held out her basket for the men to pass it to Dennison. He took an apple, gave her a dreary smile, but said nothing.

His companions were not inarticulate though they hadn't a dozen French words between them. It was good to look into the kind eyes of a wholesome-hearted girl after all those horrors over yonder. It made them feel as though they had had a bath and a shave and a new uniform.

The train went on, and Dennison hid himself behind closed eyes and an obstinate silence.

"Le brave Anglais!"

His morbid mood set those words to ironical music. The clatter of the wheels kept them running in his brain. He thought of himself as a failure and a coward.

Their resting-place was a grey old Breton town. They came to it through orchards, and the fruit was red upon the trees. A big stone building that had been a nunnery had been got ready for them, and a Breton crowd—women, children, old men and boys welcomed them at the station. They were grateful, these good Bretons, and there was a touching fervour in the way they pressed upon the men. A glint of pride sparkled in the soldiers' eyes; it was good to be an Englishman. But Dennison felt humbled; an impostor, one who had failed.

That old nunnery was the quaintest and most pleasant of places. There was a fine garden, and the townsfolk seemed to have stripped their houses to make these English comfortable. Cider, fruit, cigarettes, good food, Thomas had nothing to grumble at, and those nunnery walls heard more than an echo of life. Moreover, there was an English doctor, a rather masterful and shrewd young man who made himself a reputa-

tion by presenting the wounded with a couple of packs of cards.

Dennison moped. Instead of brightening, and filling out, he grew peakier, and more morose. Those morbid regrets became an obsession; he was not quite sane, that blunder of his took on enormous and sinister proportions.

Then he began to imagine that the men knew, and that they avoided him. Certainly they left him alone, thinking him a little queer in the head. It was done out of kindness. But Dennison, desperately and bitterly sensitive, misconstrued his own isolation. These men knew the truth; they suspected him of having played the coward.

It was the English doctor who intervened. He was no mere sawbones with no knowledge of the creature man as a subtle nexus of nerves. He had been watching Dennison for some days; the man was soul-sick; there was more here than the loss of an arm.

"Hallo, you seem fond of these out-of-the-way corners."

There was a seat in a far corner of the garden, built under a tangle of honeysuckle and climbing roses. Dennison had made it a haunt and a refuge, and here Dr. Ridder caught and blockaded him, standing full square in the entrance of this virgin bower so that Dennison could not escape.

"I can't stand noise, sir."

Ridder eyed him gravely.

"Look here, Dennison, just you tell me straight out what's on your mind. Are you worrying about that empty sleeve?"

Dennison stared at the toe of his right boot.

"No," he said, "I'm not."

"Well, what is it? Are you afraid of losing your job at home?"

"No, it isn't that. I've got a little money of my own, and I was in my uncle's office."

"Out with it. What's the matter with you? The blood-game has got on your nerves."

Dennison moved one foot to and fro, the heel scraping the gravel.

"I can't stand being with people," he said jerkily. "I can't stand being with those chaps."

"Fastidious, eh?"

"No," and he smiled drearily, "the

inside of my head feels sore. Sparks seem to go off in it when anyone kicks a chair, or speaks near me, just like a blacksmith hitting a bit of red-hot iron with a hammer."

"I see."

"I want to get away, where there isn't a sound to be heard—right away, all by myself. I shouldn't mind the sound of the sea. I could sit by the sea for hours and just watch it—and listen."

Ridder nodded.

"You want a plaster of silence on your head! There is some sense in the idea. All right, Dennison; I'll see what I can do."

His efforts were so successful that in three days Dennison found himself bumping along in a little old diligence towards the village of St. Melaine. His luggage consisted of a hamper, and a big blue handkerchief full of sundries that he had bought in the town. Two Breton women travelled with him and smiled benedictions at him with dark eyes.

Before sunset he was leaning out of an upper window of a farm-house that overlooked the sea. Translated into English its name was "Windythorn." The place was immense, elemental, enchanted. From this window Dennison looked down upon the sea—the grey, sun-gleaming Breton sea, and great black cliffs that came yawning in from the bleak headlands that enclosed a bay. Below there were acres and acres of yellow sand and rock masses uncovered at low water. Landwards leagues of heathland rolled under the blue and white of the sky. About the farm-house gnarled apple trees slanted away from the prevailing wind. Across a green meadow a file of white geese were wandering home.

The household consisted of père Callac the farmer, old Marthe, a bit of red granite, and Veronique. Silvestre, the only son, was with the army, but Veronique was nearly as good a man as her brother.

She had met Dennison at the gate, and in her frank, brave way she had taken his hand and welcomed him.

"We have given our hearts to the English. We are proud to have you in our home."

At supper he sat and stared at her surreptitiously between mouthfuls of food and mouthfuls of French flung at père

Callac, who wanted to hear everything about the war, about England, about the troops. Veronique was not talkative. She had a reposeful strength; her dark eyes were steady yet mysterious, her big mouth brave and kind. Her hair was black as charcoal; her throat round and white and a little proud. But it was her air of quiet strength that impressed Dennison. It made him feel frail and half grown.

The nights were growing cold, and after supper they sat in front of the kitchen fire. The two men smoked, old Marthe was knitting for the soldiers, and Veronique sat stitching a shirt. And ever and again she threw in a few words, looking at Dennison with those lustrous and serious eyes of hers.

"The English are very brave. We have heard it said that they have saved France."

Again that eternal harping upon English bravery! Dennison's gloom had begun to disappear in front of that cheerful fire, but Veronique's words touched the raw of his morbid self-scorn.

"War is horrible," he said, staring at the fire.

Veronique glanced at the empty sleeve, and a soft light came into her eyes.

"Where did you learn French, monsieur?"

"I spent a year in Paris—on purpose. You see, I am in a merchant's office."

"And you volunteered?"

He nodded.

"How brave!"

Old Marthe held up her red gnarled hands.

"The good God will bless the English. They are honourable; they do not desert their friends."

So Dennison went to bed, Veronique lighting him a candle at the foot of the stairs.

"If you wish for anything, monsieur, please ask."

He would have liked to ask her for peace of mind.

Dennison spent his first two days at père Callac's farm lying in the grass at the top of the cliff, and watching the sea and the sky. The strong air drugged him. He was content to lie on his back and stare at the gulls wheeling overhead, or at the great clouds marching up from the horizon. He felt soothed and sleepy.

The blood and death and battle-sweat of the last few weeks seemed to recede into the distance. His memory was less vivid and less sore.

Then he explored the bay. A steep path led down the cliff to a great half-moon of sand. At low tide a broad expanse of rocky shore lay uncovered. It was a veritable garden of the sea, with pools and winding paths, and great rocks all gorgeous with various sea weeds, green and purple and gold. Well out into the bay Dennison discovered two great flat-topped rocks that were divided by a channel about ten yards wide. They resembled the towers of a castle, and a kind of rough causeway led to them from the shore.

He was standing on one of these rocks watching the tide come racing in when he heard someone calling: A figure showed on the cliff above, a figure in a black dress and wearing a white cap. It was Veronique.

She was waving to him.

Dennison made his way back along the rough causeway, and before he reached the sands under the cliffs he was astonished at the speed with which the tide had flown in.

Veronique came down the cliff path to meet him.

"You must take care. It is not safe out there when the tide is coming in."

"One might get cut off?"

"Yes; it has happened before now. And there are only two boats in the bay: old Jehan's over yonder, and Paul Briec's on the other side."

He promised her that he would be careful, but he did not realise then whither that warning of hers would lead him.

For those first few days he just drifted here and there, a tired and saddened man who was conscious of a sense of relief, because his brain had given up thinking. He wandered over the heathland and along the cliffs, helped Veronique to pick apples, watched her milk the cows or at work in the garden. For since Silvestre and the young men were at the war the work of the land fell largely upon the women.

Dennison discovered a peculiar satisfaction in watching Veronique at her work. There was something elemental about her that soothed him and satisfied a vague longing that was inarticulate and

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yet none the less real. She was so unself-conscious, so supremely wholesome. A red apple in her hand roused in his mind a sense of the mystery of life and growth. She was the woman, but he did not realise at first that this femininity of hers was a subtle ferment working upon his manhood.

And Veronique seemed glad to have him with her. They got on wondrous well together, for there was something in this rather frail and one-armed man that appealed to the woman in her. Her eyes became soft when they looked at him; she spoke to him half soothingly, as though he were a sick child. In a little while they had dropped formalities. She asked him his Christian name and called him Henri. Somehow he had always thought of her as Veronique.

Their comradeship was a matter of nature; Dennison was a townsman and had all the townsman's curiosity with regard to life on a farm. Veronique gave him "field lectures," the most delightful lectures, as unacademic as a man could wish.

She told him the names of the apples and pears, and which apples were good for cider. He learnt much about the life of the bee, about the uses of herbs, and the wisdom of geese! Sometimes she tried to make him talk about the war, but soon found that he was loath to speak of it.

"It is a great madness," she confessed. "The good God must wish to destroy the Germans."

The simplicity of her faith was a revelation to him. It made him feel the lack of something; he was spiritually thirsty, and he desired to drink.

"It is good to be able to believe in God," he said.

She opened her grave eyes at him.

"Why, yes. Is He not here—in the orchards and watching over the sheep? Good things come out of the earth and out of our hearts, because God is with us and the Virgin pities us."

For some days Dennison was perfectly happy. He had lost that horror of remorse, a remorse bred of wounds and fever and anguish, a nightmare which haunted a man who had suffered too much.

But this peace of mind did not last. He discovered that he was in love with

Veronique, and rediscovered himself in his love for her.

Perhaps the life on that Breton farm might have saved his sanity but for a letter that reached him one morning. It came from Paris, and had been redirected and redirected. The English doctor had sent it on.

This letter came from a friend, a lieutenant in an infantry regiment. It was jocular and cheery, but its very cheerfulness was pregnant with tragedy:

"I heard you had been bowled over and sent down into Brittany, and as I was lying here with a leg off and nothing to do I thought I would send you a line. I was with Sanderson's lot. We never got a dispatch that meant all the difference between heaven and hell. We got the latter. Talk about 'shell fire! We lost seventy men in my company. Poor old Jakes had just had a letter from his wife, with a scrawl from his youngsters. He got it through the head. The men were splendid, came out of it singing, but my God! I didn't know whether to curse or to cry. And it need never have happened."

A kind of horror, a sort of stupefaction came over Dennison when he had read that letter. He had a vision of men being decimated by shell and machine-gun fire, men indescribably mangled, men biting their lips so as not to cry out. He was sitting on the cliff overlooking the bay, and he turned over, lay flat, and hid his face in the grass. But when his eyes were closed he seemed to see things even more vividly; his brain was a black screen on which danced figures of fire.

He was seized by a blind desire to escape from his own thoughts; also by a desperate idea that by punishing himself he could make amends. He sat up and stared at the sea. The tide was flowing in, and suddenly his glance fell on those two rocks standing up like the towers of a castle.

For a while he looked at them quite calmly and dispassionately. The idea was taking shape, but when once it was complete—he started up and ran down the steep path like a madman. He crossed the sands and went slipping and dodging among the rocks and pools till he reached the causeway. It took him

well out into the bay towards those two black rocks that were to be the altars of sacrifice.

Already the water was lipping the causeway when Dennison reached the first mass of rock. He scrambled up it, walked to the edge of the channel that divided it from its outlying fellow, and stood looking at the tide sweeping in. It was a calm day, and the water came in with an insidious, smooth swiftness. He had only to cross that gulf between the two rocks and wait. His retreat would be cut off; the expiation would become inevitable.

Then a cry reached him from the cliffs above. He turned, looked up, and saw Veronique. She was waving to him eagerly.

For one moment Dennison shut his eyes and set his teeth. Then he made a plunge for the gulf between the rocks and went sliding into it anyhow. The water was playing over the edge of the lower platform, but he did not notice it. He began to climb the face of the outer rock like a man escaping from a wild beast.

But he had only one hand to climb with, and three quarters of the way up his foot slipped. He fell backwards; his head struck a rock; he lay there stunned.

Veronique stood watching for Dennison to reappear. Was the man mad? Then she began to run down the path, urged on by a vague fear. The water was knee deep on the causeway when she reached it, and she had to go cautiously, feeling her way, the tide making her skirts cling about her ankles.

She kept calling as she went:

"Henri! Henri!"

She reached the first great rock, climbed it, looked over the farther edge, and saw Dennison lying below, unconscious, the water lapping about his body.

Few people would have believed it possible for a woman to drag an unconscious man up the rock face to temporary safety, but Veronique did it, only to realise that the water had deepened over the causeway, and that their retreat was cut off.

Dennison lay there helpless at her feet. She put her hands to her mouth and shouted, hoping that someone would hear.

The water had reached the level of the

top of the rock when Veronique saw old Jehan appear on the cliff. He was coming to launch his boat, and go a-fishing.

She shouted, and the old man heard her, and saw her danger. He came down the cliff path like a beneficent brown gnome, hobbled at a stiff run to where his boat lay, dragged it down the sands, and went to the rescue.

The water had risen to Veronique's knees, and she had to hold Dennison up in her arms, for he was still unconscious.

Old Jehan took them aboard.

"Mon Dieu! these English make trouble for themselves. Le pauvre garçon!"

Veronique sat with Dennison's head in her lap, and ignored old Jehan's inquisitive glances as he pulled for the shore.

"He slipped, and struck his head," she said, "and I had to go and save him."

Dennison's bed had been drawn to the window of his room so that he could lie and look out over the sea.

It was Sunday. Père Callac had trudged down to St. Melaine to smoke a pipe with a friend and to hear the news. Marthe had gone to mass and to confession, but Veronique had stayed at home.

For the man lying up above had stretched out a pathetic hand to her when she had taken him his coffee.

"Veronique, I meant to kill myself. I want to tell you why."

His eyes had searched her face.

"You won't despise me, Veronique? I've been in purgatory."

So that Sabbath morning Veronique climbed the stairs to hear this lone Englishman's confession. She drew a chair beside the bed and sat down, her hands lying folded in her lap, her eyes looking at him with a soft and steady pity. Dennison had found it difficult to meet those eyes of hers. He turned his thin face towards the window and thought of how she had saved him from the sea.

But he told her his tale, told it bravely, without sparing himself, and as she listened her eyes grew more soft and more compassionate. This man who had lost an arm seemed broken-hearted, not because he had lost an arm but because a

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morbid sensitiveness had led him to believe that he had lost his honour.

"It was that shell," he kept telling her with a plaintive persistence; "if I hadn't been watching for it for those few seconds I shouldn't have missed the road. Then they would have had the dispatch, and all those men who are dead would be alive."

She had been judging all the details of the picture he had painted for her.

"But tell me, Henri, you did not stop?"

"No."

"You rode straight on?"

"Yes, till I realised that I must have missed the right road. I was knocked over before I could get back to it."

"And so, mon pauvre, you have been living in horror, and you tried to kill yourself! Oh, Henri——"

She took his hand.

"Why?"

He flushed.

"It came over me that I ought to suffer, that I was no more use, that I should be better out of the way."

Her fingers tightened on his.

"And have you not suffered! God judge me, but I cannot see that you have cause for shame. You faced death, you rode at death. I think that you were very brave."

His head came round with a jerk, and his eyes looked up at her hungrily.

"Veronique, you are not giving me soft words to soothe me?"

"No, no. You braved death, Henri; you were struck down; where is the shame?"

He drew her hand to his mouth and kissed it.

"But I blundered," he protested, "nothing can make me forget that. If I could only be of use—go back and try to do something. But this arm!"

"God will find work for you," she said; "even now he has put a sudden thought into my heart."

She left him, ran downstairs, and reappeared with a French paper. It had been read, and re-read, and the folds were all worn and soiled. Veronique sat down on the edge of the bed, and turned the pages.

"Here—here it is!"

"What?"

"I will read."

She read:

"Interpreters are urgently needed for the English troops. The casualties among the interpreters have been so heavy that volunteers are appealed to to come forward and fill the gaps. Candidates must have a fluent knowledge of French."

Dennison started up in bed with a sudden exultant cry. His eyes were now shining.

"My God, the very thing! And it's dangerous, splendidly dangerous! I'll go to-day."

She laid the paper down, put her hands on his shoulders, and gently forced him back.

"No, no, mon brave. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, but in a week, perhaps. But you shall write, offer yourself. Here is the address."

He lay and looked into her eyes.

"Veronique, you have saved me."

She bent and kissed his forehead.

From that hour hope and pride in himself returned to Dennison. In two days he was out of bed, and at the end of a week he was taking long tramps over the moors and into the villages, getting fit in body and strong in mind.

And then a reply reached him, a reply to the letter he had written offering himself as an interpreter. He was told to report himself in Paris. He smoked his last pipe with père Callac, packed up his belongings in an old carpet bag they gave him, and started next morning to catch the diligence from St. Melaine.

Veronique went with him as far as the granite cross on the hill above the village. And there they stood awhile, holding hands, and looking into each other's eyes. The war had brought them together; the war might part them; they could not tell.

"If I get through I shall come back," he said.

She looked at the stone cross.

"I will pray that you may come back. I shall wait for you, Henri."

They kissed, and Dennison went down the hill, Veronique watching him, her lips moving as though in prayer. He turned and waved to her.

"God keep you, mon brave," she said to herself, and there were tears in her eyes.

Fun of PL. 1
at home?

Proof The New Magazine

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A Rose of Picardy

An Arcadian Love Story

By Warwick Deeping



MAURICE WOOLMER opened the door of the Café de la Paix and walked in.

The big room was quite empty, save for its long deal tables and benches, its little counter, and the clock that ticked over the inner door. A big jar full of red peonies blazed on the counter. The deal tables had been bleached white by constant scrubblings, and the bare floor was as clean as the tables. The place smelt sweet and wholesome. One might have said that it resembled the bare and simple room of a primitive meeting house where men came to pray to their God rather than a place where they drank red wine.

The inner door opened, a door with glass panels in it, and a girl came through into the outer room.

Woolmer saluted her.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle; on dit que vous avez une chambre pour un officier."

She was a tall girl, dark and comely, with a well-shaped head and finely moulded lips and nose. She looked at Woolmer appraisingly, her black eyes unsmiling.

"I have a room, Monsieur."

He felt her quiet hostility, and being sensitive, he flushed.

"It is for myself. I am the new Town Major here. My sergeant advised me to come here—to your house. I hate troubling you, Mademoiselle."

Her dark eyes had studied him all the while he was labouring with his French. She noticed the two gold wound stripes on his sleeve and that his left arm bent stiffly at an angle. And suddenly her intuition seemed to visualise for her what manner of man he was, for her eyes lost their opaque look and softened with light.

"Will you see the room, Monsieur? It is very simple."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. I assure you I shall give you no trouble."

She led the way through into the inner

room, and there Woolmer had a glimpse of a second girl seated by the window, sewing, her brown hair all a glitter of gold. She looked up at him, and he saw her full, round face, frank and grave with its blue grey eyes and its determined little chin.

Woolmer saluted.

"Good day, Mademoiselle."

She answered him very quietly in a soft, full voice, and bent her eyes again on the work that lay in her lap.

So Lieutenant Maurice Woolmer found himself billeted in the Café de la Paix, a veteran of seven-and-twenty, broken in the wars, and relegated to the Town Majorship of a small French town. The life was new and strange to him and rather lonely, and his only English associates were his old Scotch sergeant and an under-sized Cockney clerk. Yvetot was in a new area that was being developed, and the only English troops in it were the grubby and undisciplined members of an M.T. company.

Woolmer was shy and punctilious, one of those quick-blooded, sensitive men who are a little afraid of women. He went in and out of the Café de la Paix with a brisk salute and a curt phrase or two about the weather. Now and again he would pause to say a few words to Grandpère, a morose, white-headed old gentleman who worked a small farm, or to thank Grandmère for his morning cup of coffee. He was very polite to dark Lucille, and to little Claire, who taught in the École, he said nothing at all. But he noticed her, almost without realizing that he noticed her. Her soft brown hair, white throat, and grave grey eyes; her air of quiet reticence and her firm red lips were like the lines of a pleasant picture.

A chance incident led to the breaking of his shy reserve. It happened over a spilt work-basket and a whole platoon of reels scattered about the floor. Woolmer chanced in, and obeying an impulse, helped in the mopping up.

Their hands touched as they reached for the same reel under a chair.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle."

Her grey eyes laughed out at him sud-

denly, eyes all a-glimmer with light, and he wondered why her face seemed suddenly to have caught a strange new beauty.

"Is that all—of the lost sheep?"

"I think so. Wait."

She pointed to a roll of red silk in a corner, and Woolmer dived for it and came back with a flushed face.

"Thank you, Monsieur."

He loitered a moment, the victim of a sudden heart hunger, and then went about his work.

He found himself thinking continually of the Café de la Paix. It struck him that he had never realized how quiet the place was, so utterly unlike any other café or *estaminet* he could remember. He had seen a few old Frenchmen sitting at the deal tables, drinking coffee or beer or red wine; quiet old Frenchmen who looked worn and tired. Once or twice he had noticed an English motor transport driver there, probably some uncouth but would-be gallant animal whom Mademoiselle Lucille kept in absolute awe. There was never any noise. The café was as quiet as it was clean.

"They seem awfully decent people."

He fought with a certain shyness all that day, and in the evening he made his first advance. Instead of passing through the inner room and going straight to the doorway that led to the staircase, he paused and stood looking at the group about the table. Grandmère had just brought the coffee pot from the stove, Grandpère was lighting his pipe. Claire and Lucille were sitting next the window reading a letter that had come from their brother at the front.

"*Toujours—la café, Madame?*"

Grandmère's wise old eyes scanned his face.

"*Asseyez vous, Monsieur, si vous voulez.*"

And Woolmer sat down with a shy glance at the girls.

In five minutes the party was as merry as one as any lonely heart could have desired. Woolmer's French was somewhat primitive, but he lost his shyness in feeling that he was in the presence of nothing but goodwill.

"I speak French very badly, you know."

They assured him that he was quite fluent.

"But I shall learn. Perhaps, you speak English, Mademoiselle?"

He looked at Claire. In fact his eyes

were always wandering in her direction; she seemed to understand him so quickly.

"No, Monsieur."

Lucille held up shocked hands.

"Oh—little liar! She reads English books, Monsieur."

Claire blushed and became of a sudden a creature of charming vivacity.

"I read it, yes; but the pronunciation, no; it is so difficult. I cannot understand the English method, it's so queer and whimsical."

She tried to explain her difficulties, and Woolmer just sat and looked at her like a fascinated child.

Presently they came to a deadlock over some word or other. A little French-English dictionary was produced from a drawer, and two heads were bent very close over it, and two forefingers nearly touched on the page. Lucille, that calm young woman, watched them judicially and nodded her head. She had a shrewd knowledge of men had Lucille, and a hearty contempt for most of them, but she nodded her head over Maurice Woolmer.

"You will be quarrelling soon, *mes enfants.*"

Oblivious of everybody they were looking steadily into each other's eyes and arguing about a word.

"But it has not the same meaning in French."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"I am trying to tell you, Monsieur."

"I ask your pardon for being so stupid."

Then they both laughed, each quickly conscious of the brightness of the other's eyes.

That was the beginning of Maurice Woolmer's romance. He went to bed in a mood of exaltation and sensitive bewilderment. "She's absolutely sweet," he thought. "It's extraordinary. Fancy going into an English 'pub' and finding people like that. We're gross savages—and beastly vulgar. And fancy her having read Kipling and Swinburne. What horrible snobs we English are!" Which reflection showed that Woolmer was an "original" and not the ordinary male cad. In fact, the war had turned his Cambridge soul inside out. He was a frank Socialist and a soldier, and dreamed dreams of a time when England should cease to be the home of stupid and selfish respectability and of a purblind proletariat whose motto seemed to be "Give little, get much."

A ROSE OF PICARDY



"How charming you look!" It was the first open compliment he had paid her

He began to spend a part of nearly every evening with the family, in perfect and happy tranquillity of soul. His French grew more fluent and easy. He even began to argue on Socialism with Lucille, Lucille who did not wholly agree with him.

"Socialism, yes, for you—Monsieur—very good and pleasant. But all men are not like you. Stupid, selfish beasts. What do you think, Claire?"

Claire had leanings towards Woolmer's idealism.

"It all sounds so splendid."

"Sounds, yes. But men must have masters to make them work. Lazy beggars. And it would be very bad for us."

Woolmer protested, but Lucille held her ground.

"You say you love men, Monsieur. Some

day perhaps you may have cause to hate them. I have hated them very often. Swine!"

Then came the day when some interfering superior chanced into Yvetot and was rude to the Town Major.

"What! You are increasing your area, you know. You'll have to be more central. Move your office to Granleu. You have got to develop these villages and not think you are put here to go to sleep. There will be troops arriving in a day or so. Move to Granleu at once."

So Woolmer moved to Granleu, which was three miles away, cursing his meddlesome superior, and regretting his billet at the Café de la Paix. He hung about half the morning, waiting for Claire to come in from the school. She had picked a handful of

narcissi in Grandmère's garden, and her eyes were a little clouded and grave. Lucille, hovering in the front room, left the two alone.

"It's au revoir, Mademoiselle Claire. May I come back here and see you?"

He saw her face flush, and her frank eyes glimmer up to his.

"If you wish."

"Of course. And—I say—will you give me those flowers?"

Their hands touched for a moment.

"Au revoir, Monsieur."

"Au revoir."

Woolmer fled hastily into the street, and nearly collided with a soiled Tommy, who stared at the white flowers in the officer's hand.

Woolmer said "Curse." Then he slipped the flowers into a side pocket, crushing the stalks, and thanking heaven that Claire could not see how he carried her flowers.

For two days Maurice Woolmer was very busy. English troops were arriving, and eager "advance officers" wanted to drag him round half a dozen villages. Woolmer had to billet a whole battalion in Yvetot, and in doing so realized that an officer should be billeted at the Café de la Paix. An absurd jealousy seized him. Moreover, the officer with him was a paltry little bounder; Woolmer knew the type—he wiped the bedroom in the Café de la Paix off his billeting list. It did not occur to him to realize what that decision suggested.

He was tormented all next day by a longing to see Claire, and the evening saw him on the road to Yvetot full of troops, soiled brown men wandering about everywhere, but his innocence remained quite untroubled.

There was a group of men near the Café de la Paix. Woolmer walked past them, taking their salute, and heading for the familiar doorway. He was almost inside that big, clean room with its deal tables before he realized the change that had come over it.

The room was full of Tommies, noisy men with glasses of wine or beer on the tables. Moreover, it smelt of them and their smoke. Two of them were lounging against the little counter, trying to make love to Lucille, who was bored, but smilingly patient.

Woolmer came to an abrupt pause, feeling most absurdly and sensitively shocked.

"Bon soir, Mademoiselle."

Lucille answered him with a quick smile:

"Bon soir, Monsieur."

Woolmer had blushed all red.

"Have you an officer billeted here?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Thank you; I wished to know. Bon soir."

And he walked out again, conscious of being stared at by a dozen pairs of unfriendly eyes.

And behind the inner door a brown head had raised itself expectantly at the sound of his voice, and a pair of grave grey eyes had watched him through the glass of the panel. The girl's eyes clouded when he turned and fled, and she bent her head again over the book she was reading. But Maurice Woolmer knew nothing of this. He was on his way back to Granleu with a flushed face and a head full of turbulent self-questionings. He had a feeling that he had made a fool of himself. But why? What did it matter to him if the Café de la Paix happened to be full of Tommies?

But it did matter, for love is a very sensitive creation, quick, jealous, acutely self-conscious, with an almost morbid dread of mockery and false positions. Woolmer was attacked by the idea that the coming of these men had made his presence superfluous at the Café de la Paix. He would be in the way there, an embarrassment. And in struggling with these thoughts he fell into most damnable doubtings of the sincerity of the girls themselves. Vulgarly—to a sensitive soul—contaminates all its surroundings, and in imagination Woolmer saw the two girls as the smiling associates of men whose coarse thoughts were never concealed. The picture maddened him. There was no doubt now about his love. He was suffering from the most bitter and humiliating form of jealousy, the jealousy of a man in the presence of inferior beasts.

The morning brought a reaction. In the clean sunlight of a June day he started out on his bicycle to make the round of his villages, and his way lay through Yvetot, Yvetot on a Sunday morning. And in the main street he chanced on Claire going to Mass, Claire, whose frank face looked so pure and transparent and charming under the shadow of a black hat.

Woolmer was off his bike and saluting. His eyes were shy in his brown face.

"What a lucky chance. I had wished to see you so much."

"And we have been quite lonely."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

A ROSE OF PICARDY

Her eyes looked into his, and somehow his soul felt satisfied, well content. She seemed part of the spring, part of the freshness and beauty of these French orchards.

"May I visit you all?"

Her eyes looked vaguely puzzled.

"Why—yes. If you wish it."

She knew in a way that he wished it, but his diffidence and a certain futile hesitancy troubled her. She was still wondering why he had run away the other night.

"I'm grateful. And how is Lucille?"

"Very busy."

"And Grandmère?"

"Grandmère hoes weeds in the fields."

"Oh, you wonderful French. And to-day you have a holiday?"

"Yes, I am lazy."

He was the lover again, if a shy one, when he left her, and her eyes were happy and full of light.

"By Heaven! she's sweet and clean," he said to himself, and his heart sang.

Yvetot saw him again that evening, walking boldly like a happy lover. He found the Café de la Paix empty, for Lucille was tired of the eternal Tommy and had kept the door locked. Claire and Grandmère were sitting in the orchard at the back of the house, and there Woolmer found his love, dressed all in white, a white rose in a green setting.

"How charming you look!"

It was the first open compliment he had paid her, and her face coloured above her white throat. And Grandmère's blue eyes beamed on him.

"How does Monsieur like Granleu?"

Woolmer did not like it at all, and said so with such emphasis that they all laughed heartily.

It was one of the happiest hours of his life. His love braved it into the sunlight and felt proud and exultant. What had he to fear?

What, indeed! Yet when he stepped out into the dusk from the café door he walked straight into a group of grinning Tommies who had been on the prowl through the town. They did not salute him; moreover, they should have been in bed.

"Why aren't you men in your billets?"

The challenge flashed in his brain, but he clipped the words off his tongue, and walked past them, feeling furious. Somehow he realized that those men had him at a disadvantage.

And then suddenly he turned on them

in a white rage, for he had heard their mutterings.

"Now the bloomin' officer's finished it's our turn with the girls."

"What do you men belong to?"

His voice was like the crack of a whip, and the men came to attention.

"Seventh Blankshires, sir."

"Why aren't you in your billets?"

No answer.

"Well, get there—at once. And don't stand about making blackguards of yourselves outside respectable houses. That's all."

They slouched off, and he waited till they were out of sight, but their voices and bursts of coarse laughter came back to him.

"Swine!"

What a beastly thing sex could be. He hated men for the moment as Lucille had prophesied he might hate them.

None the less, those words of theirs had left poison in his heart. Was he a fool, a dupe, an idiot whom common men grinned at and cheated behind his back? Was it possible that his intuitions were all wrong? He loathed the suspicion, but could not kill it with mere loathing.

And so it came about that he spent two most miserable days, his finer self struggling with that baser self that lives in every man and is provoked by the baser natures of the many. His idealism won a passing victory in the end, and ventured to assert its strength. He had promised Claire two English books, and the third evening he set out for Yvetot with the books under his arm.

But chance staged a seemingly cynical and mocking fate for him that evening. He was within thirty yards of the Café de la Paix when he saw a brown knot of rowdy men emerge from the doorway. Two or three were throwing kisses back to someone within.

Woolmer faltered, and walked on, keeping to the middle of the road. He had a sudden glimpse of the two girls standing just inside the doorway. A little, loose-mouthed soldier was trying to pat Lucille's cheek, but she put his hand aside and smiled, a smile that smothered her impatience and contempt. Claire was smiling also, for sometimes a woman has to smile at a crowd.

But Woolmer's face blazed. He walked straight past the café, flashing one swift

glance at Claire and Lucille. He did not salute, or give them one sign of recognition. In fact, he cut them dead.

Ten minutes later the two books were lying in the bottom of a grass-grown ditch, where he had tossed them, and Claire was standing under a tree in the orchard, staring into the green distance with eyes full of pain. To her came Lucille, Lucille strong and scornful, who had at last managed to rid her house of that boring crowd.

"*Ma petite.*"

Claire's eyes were wet with tears.

"He will never come here again," she said. "He's so quick and proud, and he doesn't understand."

Lucille kissed her.

"I can hardly forgive him for that. Is it pleasant for two women to have to be patient with those fools? I think I shall give up this place, child. If only we had our men at home."

"But he despises us."

"If he does, *ma chérie*, then he is no man for you."

For three days Maurice Woolmer was the most miserable of men. He could not decide whether he had been a wise fool or a coward.

His misery culminated in a desperate visit to Yvetot. It was a Monday afternoon, and he knew that Claire did not teach on Mondays.

Absurd, sensitive, yet utterly human lover! He almost turned back when he came in sight of the Café de la Paix, but forced himself to go on. And next minute he found himself standing in that clean and empty room talking to Lucille, his heart all a-flutter. For he had had a glimpse of a girl with brown hair flitting into the orchard like a frightened bird. Lucille held her distance, watching with calm eyes.

"We are very angry with you, Monsieur."

"Why angry, Lucille?"

"If Monsieur will remember the other night. If Monsieur is too proud to salute us in public—"

Then Woolmer's lips were unsealed and a sense of guilt seized him.

"Lucille, I must see Claire."

"And why?"

"Because—because—"

She flamed at him suddenly.

"Monsieur, what do you think we are—mere cheap women to be treated as you

please? My Heaven, do you think that it is pleasant for women to live here all alone and to have to bear with patience the insults of any soldier who chooses to walk into this house? Our men are not here to help us. And so—we have to smile and shrug our shoulders to keep all fool men in a good temper and prevent them breaking our glasses and making a scandal. Oh, yes! it is very pleasant for women who have pride. And you—you, Monsieur—no doubt think that we like to seem cheap, to hear these fools make love to us. How little you understand."

Woolmer was red with generous shame.

"Lucille—I have been a sensitive fool. You have shamed me—utterly. Can you forgive?"

She regarded him steadily.

"It is not for me to forgive."

"But Claire—"

He burst out like an impetuous boy.

"She must forgive me. I love her. I want her for my wife. Oh—Lucille! Help!"

The tall French girl hesitated for a moment. Then she stood aside and made a gesture towards the door.

"She is in the orchard. But be very sure, Monsieur, there is not a sweeter, better girl in all France. She helped me that night with those noisy fools—"

But Woolmer hardly waited to hear her. He went out into the green orchard, heart and soul aflame, his eyes hot with unshed tears. He caught sight of Claire sitting on the bench under one of the apple trees.

"Claire—"

She looked up at him with eyes that seemed full of shadows.

"Monsieur—"

"Claire, I love you. I want to be forgiven."

Her eyes filled with light.

"Forgiven—"

"I was a sensitive fool; I thought perhaps you did not want me here. I don't deserve to be forgiven—"

"You love me?"

"Yes."

"But—in England—you are a gentleman—"

"Oh—my dear! I want you."

He caught her hands and kissed them passionately, and she did not resist.

"Will you forgive me, Claire?"

She said something in her soft voice that made him kiss her hands again.

That Letter!

*He had cheated death and come back,
and they had written to her to say
that he was dead*

By Warwick Deeping



GREYNESS was just showing in the east when I crawled the last ten yards to our first-line trenches, and managed to wriggle under a strand of badly fixed barbed wire. The stillness of the dawn was falling over the land. Night, with its eternal wild racket of machine-gun and rifle fire, was disappearing in the west.

I lay flat below the level of the parapet and hailed the men on the other side.

"Hallo—the Red Rifles!"

I heard mutterings and the shuffling of feet.

"Hallo?"

"Who the devil are you?"

"It's some ruddy German, corp'r'l!"

I had eaten next to nothing for two days, and my temper was explosive.

"Damn it, are you the Reds?"

"We are—that."

"Don't you know your own officer? I'm Captain Forbes; I've been waiting till those 'ools stopped using that machine-gun."

A sceptical voice answered me.

"None of those games, Mr. Fritz! Get at that loophole, Toddy, and see there's no more of 'em crawlin' up. Stand up, you blighter."

"I tell you I'm Captain Forbes," I said, keeping my head down.

"Rats. Captain Forbes was shot two days ago when we attacked. You're too bloomin' clever."

I was trying to place the man's voice.

"Is that you, Samson, speaking?"

"You're a bright one; Samson it is."

"Well, don't you remember that night at Ypres when we were billeted in the brewery, and a shell came into the big vat where the men were going to have a wash?"

"Blast my eyes, it must be you, sir."

"That's better," I said, "don't shoot. I'm coming over before the light's good enough for one of their snipers to pot me."

I scrambled over the parapet and slid down into the trench, the men crowding up on either side of me.

"It's you, sir, sure enough," said the corporal, "though you ain't exactly clean." He sniffed expressively.

"Oh—dash the dirt; has anyone got any food? I have been living on chocolate and some meat lozenges."

They produced tinned meat, bread and jam, and someone brewed me a cup of tea. I ate like a hungry animal, and with immense satisfaction.

"Where's the Colonel, corporal?"

"In the reserve trenches, sir, in his dug-out."

"Good. I'll go and report."

I borrowed a pipe of tobacco and walked off down the narrow earthy lane where the life of the place went to and fro at dusk and at dawn. The sun was up now; the tense strain of the night was over; men were lighting fires under their mess kettles, and washing themselves, for water had always been plentiful in our system of trenches. The brown curves of the communicating trench took me back for a quarter of a mile behind the firing line. The men whom I passed stared hard and curiously at me as they saluted.

I found the Colonel sitting on a wooden box in the mouth of his dug-out. He was shaving himself, and staring hard into the little nickel mirror pegged to the earth wall. He did not look at me, being too intent on handling his razor.

"I have come to report, sir. I'll wait till you have finished."

At the sound of my voice he turned his head sharply, and stared up at me, his razor held poised in the air.

"Forbes?"

"I think so, sir."

"Good heavens, man, we had put you down as dead!"

"I'm very much alive, sir."

"Let me hear about it."

He went on with his shaving after the grimly practical fashion of men who have grown hard in war, and I told him my adventures, how I had spent one day hiding in a ruined German dug-out, and a second

day lying perdu in a shell crater between the lines. He listened with a set frown on his face, his eyes looking fiercely into the mirror.

"Confound it, man, but I've written a letter and posted it."

"Who to, sir?"

"Your wife."

"What, you've told her, sir."

"I thought it the kindest thing to do," he said.

In my time I had run up against the various sorts of fear, but I have never felt so deadly sick and empty as I felt that morning when I stood looking down at the Colonel's old brown blackguard of a face, and realised what he had done. The bottom of my manhood seemed to drop out of me, and my blood might have been turned to water.

"Good lord! It's due in three months!"

"Oh—she's that way?"

"Our first. And she's such a sensitive little woman. The news may—"

I dared not give voice to my panic thoughts. All my soul seemed to be reaching out to that home of mine in Kent, and to that dark-eyed, delicate little woman who was more to me than life. War sanctifies a great love. I felt most horribly helpless.

The Colonel shut his razor with a snap.

"I'm sorry, Forbes."

"All right, sir. When did you send that letter?"

"Yesterday."

"Then she may possibly get it to-morrow morning."

He nodded.

"We might wire."

"I've known wires go hopelessly wrong, sir. You may think me a fool, but I've never been in such a devil of a funk before. I'd rather—"

He got up and slapped me on the shoulder.

"I'll get you out of this somehow, Forbes. Supposing you have four days' leave."

"Yes, sir—but—"

He gave me one of those fierce looks of his.

"Get along to your dug-out, man, and have a shave and a clean up. I'll see what can be done."

I obeyed him, but my obedience was just the blind and miserable fulfilment of an order. I found my servant waiting for me, smiling as though we had won a victory. I felt more like death. I washed and

shaved mechanically, got into some clean clothes, and put on a spare tunic that I had in my valise. Pratt, my servant, insisted on cleaning my boots till they shone. The fellow's kindness made life seem a grinning mockery.

Then I went and walked up and down a bit of disused trench that branched off from the main lines. I knew that spring had come to the earth; up above there the grass was growing lush and green; the orchards were in bloom; the birds sang; trees were bursting into leaf. I could remember the almost incredulous exultation with which I had saved my life, saved it for her. I had never expected to come back alive, to cheat those hell-begotten Germans. And now they had sent word to her that I was dead, and the shock of the news might lead to tragic happenings.

I walked up and down that narrow brown lane feeling like a beast confined in a pit. I could see nothing but the crumbling soil and a fringe of grass showing at the edges. The sky was blue overhead, and I remember wondering whether it was blue in England.

Then young Lorrimer found me out, and smothered me with congratulations. He was just a chattering, good-natured fool of a boy, with a genius for playing the clown at a funeral.

"I say, the old man was awful sick when you didn't come back. He's not a bad old buster, talked about putting your name in for the V.C."

"Did he?"

My voice had no enthusiasm.

"Oh, buck up, old chap. Think what a nice surprise it will be for your missus when that letter's contradicted—"

I turned on Lorrimer like an angry dog.

"Oh, go to blazes, you unmitigated little fool!"

He looked at me with astonished, grieved eyes.

"All right, old chap. What's wrong? Feeling a bit peevish?"

"I want to kill something," I said, "you had better clear out."

He went.

I must have patrolled that trench for an hour before my man found me and brought me a message.

"Colonel's sent for you, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Officers' mess, sir."

The officers' mess was an improvised cellar reached by a passage leading from

THAT LETTER!

the main trench. A certain amount of daylight reached it through rough windows almost on the ground level, windows that could be barricaded with sandbags when the enemy were shelling us. The handyman of the regiment had furnished the place.

I found the Colonel standing in the doorway, smoking a pipe. Flemming, the Adjutant, was having breakfast; he got up

"Then he'll pass within six miles of my place."

The Colonel's grey eyes glimmered.

"Then if you get home in time, man, we'll call that letter a wipe out."

An immense excitement took possession of me. I was going home, I was going to see her, I was going to lounge for two whole days in my own garden. A soldier lives for the moment, or on the expectation of a few



"Good heavens, man, we had put you down as dead!"

and just gave me a grip of the hand. No one else was there.

"I've been over to the gunners, Forbes."

"Yes, sir."

"They rang up the Flying Corps people at St. Jean. I got the wire with the C.O. A flying man is taking a machine back to England this evening."

I felt my heart beating faster.

"I have fixed it up for you, Forbes. He'll take you as passenger, and drop you the other side. How will that suit you?"

"It's awfully good of you, sir. I'll go, and thank God for it. Where's the man bound for?"

"Eastchurch."

hours' strange and poignant happiness. St. Jean and the aeroplane park were twelve miles behind the firing line. I went to my dug-out to get a heavy coat and to pack my haversack. The Colonel sent a note after me.

"You may be able to pick up a Red Cross car at the village," it said; "if not you are sure to find a supply wagon going back. The flying man starts at five."

It was not yet the middle of the morning, but I set out, and tramped along the main communicating trench for a matter of a mile. Here some rising ground gave cover, and beyond the ridge lay Hirson village where the Army Medical people had a dressing station. I was in luck. An ambulance

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car was travelling back to a field hospital within three miles of St. Jean. There was room for me beside the driver, and I climbed up like a boy.

That drive through the French country was unforgettable. The coming of spring had softened the horror of war, and spread a glamour over the earth. The mud and the greyness and the slush were gone. Even some of the ruined cottages looked less like skeletons now that Nature was smothering them with green growth.

The car set me down at the cross roads three miles from St. Jean, and I slung my coat over my shoulder and set out to walk to the place. An aeroplane was droning overhead, the sunlight glistening on its yellow planes, so that it looked a thing of gold against the blue of the sky. I had brought my rations with me, and I chose the garden of a little ruined house beside the road to lunch in. There were wallflowers in bloom, and the smell of the flowers made me think of my own home.

I don't know why my mood changed. Perhaps it was a natural reaction after the excitement of the morning. A growing restlessness took possession of me, and I began to be worried by silly, flickering anxiety. I could not get away from the thought of that letter travelling on its way to Marjory. Supposing by some perverse chance the post should be speeded up so that the letter arrived before I did? Supposing our aeroplane broke down? Supposing the wind got up and blew a gale? Supposing we found a fog in the Channel? It is amazing what a genius some of us have for self-torment. We set out deliberately to face all manner of imaginary catastrophes.

I had about three hours left in which to walk three miles, but I started off without allowing myself five minutes' meditation over a pipe. I wanted to be absolutely sure of reaching St. Jean; I wanted to find myself on the aviation ground and standing on guard beside the machine that was to take me to England.

The aeroplane park was a flat piece of grass land lying between two low hills on the north of the village. I found a lieutenant of the Flying Corps standing outside one of the hangars.

"You are not Lieutenant Jakes, I suppose?"

"No."

"I'm Captain Forbes of the Red Rifles.

Lieutenant Jakes is giving me a lift over the Channel."

Then I had one of the shocks of my life.

"Jakes? He's started, I saw him go up half an hour ago."

"Good lord, are you sure?"

He gave me a queer, searching look.

"I'll find out."

He walked off, while I fumed up and down, feeling most miserably anxious.

In ten minutes my lieutenant friend came strolling back as though nothing on earth mattered. He belonged to the casual type that hides its keen efficiency under a mask of nonchalance.

"It's all right. Jakes is up trying a new machine. He'll be back in ten minutes. Have a cigarette."

We smoked, and talked as though we were utterly bored with life.

"There's your man."

He pointed to a dark speck poised against the distant blue.

"He'll be down in three minutes."

"Pretty smart flyer?"

"Oh, quite decent, one of your thorough, cheerful beasts."

A big monoplane came sailing down on us, circled, swooped, and planed to the earth. It went bumping across the grass towards the hangar, driven by occasional spurts of the engine. My casual friend stirred.

"Come along, sir, I'll introduce you."

I liked Jakes from the first hand-grip. He was a big, round-faced, quiet boy of a man, with eyes the colour of blue turquoise, and a smile that knew no sin.

"Captain Forbes? That's all right, sir; we start about half-past four. You had better let us lend you some clothes."

"I've got a heavy coat."

"You don't know how devilish cold it can be up there. Where do you want me to drop you?"

I explained, and he smiled.

"I know all that country; plenty of grass for landing. All right; we'll have some tea before we start."

He was a punctual boy. We started from the meadows of St. Jean at one minute after the half-hour. I had been in an aeroplane before, but then it had been a grim and purposeful business, and no flight homeward between the wings of a great bird. It was a gorgeous spring afternoon with the atmosphere very clear, and the sunlight brilliant upon the earth below us. The machine

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climbed up in huge spirals, and then set off like a carrier pigeon straight for home.

The earth was a great green carpet trailing beneath us, patterned over with villages, scrolls of brown and white and red. The engine was working perfectly, and in an amazingly short time I saw the sea, a grey-blue streak beyond the green lip of northern France. I thrilled at the sight. Away yonder lay the white cliffs, and all the pleasant land of Kent.

Jakes shouted at me.

"Not bad for an old bus! I'm bringing back a regular scorcher."

"This is quite good enough for me," I roared at him.

We were over the sea; where a couple of patrol boats were rushing eastwards, looking like grey torpedoes with spurts of white foam at their bows. I had a view of the shipping strung along the Channel, and the menace of the submarine seemed a thing of no account. But England lay ahead, a dim green world, the home country, infinitely dear.

"Damn!"

I heard Jakes rip out a sharp oath. The rhythmic roar of the engine had changed to a stuttering and irregular stream of explosions.

"What's wrong?"

"Engine's misfiring; plugs gone wrong, or something."

We were still over the sea but well up, and there were no white cliffs ahead of us, but a vast stretch of green marshland dotted with villages and flat as a map.

I glanced at Jakes over my shoulder. That brown, blue-eyed face of his had lost some of its tan—none of its look of healthy good-humour.

"We can just do it."

"By planing down?"

"Yes. I've spotted where to land."

We did it, with about two hundred yards to spare, gliding down over Dymchurch sea-wall and landing in a meadow beyond the dyke. Jakes was smiling. He had been making calculations while in the air, and the accuracy of his estimate pleased him.

We climbed out. A car had stopped on the road that runs along inside the sea-wall, and the people in it were watching us.

Jakes nodded in their direction.

"Get them to give you a lift somewhere. And you might send a wire off for me."

"It seems rather a mean trick, leaving you."

"Oh, I'm going to enjoy myself. I always love fooling round, finding things out."

I wished Jakes "Good-bye," honestly relieved that he did not want me to stay with him and help him tinker at the faulty machine.

I waved to the people in the car and crossed over to them. The father of the family who was at the wheel sang out to me cheerily.

"I say, can we do anything for you?"

"Which way are you going?"

"Ashford and Canterbury."

"If you could give me a lift. I want to get to Canterbury."

The old gentleman turned and looked at the back seat.

"Yes, I think we might manage. Madge, go and sit with your mother, and let the officer join me."

I thanked him, and apologised to his womenfolk for causing so much trouble.

"Not a bit," said a sympathetic voice, "but what about the poor man with the aeroplane?"

"He's staying with his machine," I said, "he likes breakdowns; they teach him something. He wants me to send a wire off for him, that's all."

We were off, and the old boy beside me asked naively if I was in a hurry.

I explained that the need was super-urgent.

"Then I can scorch," he said, with a sly and happy smile, "and my wife will be quite unable to object."

We did scorch, most outrageously, and in spite of a protest from the back seat of "John, aren't you driving rather fast," while I, with an occasional glance at the speedometer, saw the needle touch forty, and rejoiced. The old boy was such a sportsman that I told him why I had so furious a desire to find myself at home. I let him alone at the corners, but when the car was speeding along the straight, we put our heads nearer together and conversed.

He insisted on driving me through Canterbury and leaving me within half a mile of my home. I am afraid he was more pleased with himself than were his womenfolk, for they looked at me sourly enough when I saluted and said "Good-bye."

I glanced at my wrist-watch. It was just a quarter-past seven, less than three hours since I had left St. Jean, a dozen miles or so behind the English lines. And I was within a mile of my own home, and every

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tree and every turn of the road were familiar.

I wanted to run like a boy, for things seem to become doubly vivid now that I was left by myself in that green English lane. I had lost my vague dread in my rush through the air with Jakes, and while that old sportsman was pushing his car up hills at thirty miles an hour. The fear returned that the Colonel's letter might still be ahead of me, that Marjory might believe me dead before my live self could prove the contrary.

I took the field path through High Ash Wood, and down through the hop fields in Cherry Valley. I did not meet a soul, for which I was thankful; somehow I did not want a yokel's eyes staring me in the face. From the meadows on the other side of Cherry Valley I could see my own house, with the green parkland sloping down from it, the white cowls of the old oast houses, and the great spruce trees in the wood behind the orchard.

The field path brought me out again into the lane about two hundred yards from my own lodge gate, and just ahead of me I saw a little, squat, blue-coated figure stumping along with a letter bag slung over his shoulder. It was the local postman making his evening round.

I overtook him just before he reached the gate.

"Any letters for me, Bannister?" I asked him.

He just turned and stared.

"Lord, sir, who'd 'ave thought of seeing you here!"

He had a packet of letters in his hand, and he began to pass them out to me, one by one, making comments as he did so.

"That's for you, sir; that's for your good lady; here we are, Miss Flora Higgins, that's your scullery maid, sir; will you take it? Lot of rubbishy circulars, but not so much as there used to be. And how's the war going, sir? Suppose we're giving them Germans socks."

The Colonel's letter was not in the batch. I wished Bannister "Good night," and went swinging up the drive.

I think I never loved the old place so much as I loved it that May evening. The

western sunlight was streaming through the trees that were all a-shimmer of green gossamer. The meadows were yellowing with buttercups, and the birds were singing as though the war was at an end. It was the glorious, sweet tranquillity that touched me and filled me with a kind of awe.

Across the rail fence and just before the yew hedge began I caught sight of Marjory. She was moving slowly along one of the flower borders stirring the earth with a light hoe. Her white dress showed up against the old red-brick wall, and the flowers at her feet wove a carpet of many colours. She had always loved that particular border, with its southern aspect, and in May it was crammed with polyanthus, tulips, daffodils, wallflowers, forget-me-not, anemones, arabis, and London pride.

Her back was towards me. I climbed the rail fence and called to her.

"Hallo, old girl!"

She turned and stood looking at me incredulously. I was crossing the broad lawn that had been mown that morning.

"It's my real self; I've been given four days' leave."

She dropped the hoe and came towards me. She did not say anything, but there was a look in her eyes such as I had never seen before. Then she was clinging to me, and I had my arms about her.

"Oh, my dear, is it you, is it really you?"

She held me at arm's length and looked at me as though I could not be real.

"I'm solid enough, little woman."

"Oh, Jack, God must have sent you."

She put her head on my shoulder and burst into tears.

In a moment she grew calmer.

"For two days I have had a horrible feeling, a feeling that something had happened to you. And I had no letter yesterday. Perhaps it was just foolishness."

I took her face between my hands and kissed her.

"I was put down as missing," I said, "and the Colonel had written to you; that is why I came. I wanted to make sure that you did not get that letter."

"Dear——"

And looking into her eyes I wondered why men made war.



Three Lives

*And the Tragedy that Didn't
Happen*

By Warwick Deeping

LIEUT. JOHN BUCHENHAM was a very ordinary young man in khaki; but since this war has been the triumph and the glory of the ordinary young man, no one need quarrel with this very simple tale.

Also the war has taught us to curse a clear sky and the full moon, and John Buchenham cursed them both as he walked home to his little flat in Battersea, where his young wife lay expecting her first child. He was home on leave and due to return to France in two days.

"Damn you! Why isn't it raining like blazes?"

He was feeling about as miserable as a man can feel. His leave was coming to an end, and he was about to be taken away from his wife at the most human crisis of their two lives. She was such a little, fragile thing. And, finally, there was that infernal "stunt" for which the division had been training and fattening for a month. He would just be in time for it, and Phyllis was expecting her baby next week.

He stopped outside the main entrance of Pevensy Mansions and eyed the clear sky as a very likely cruising space for predatory Gothas.

"What a beast of a war! Lord—I wish——"

He wished many things, gentle and otherwise, as he climbed the stairs to the third floor and let himself into his little flat.

The electric light in the hall showed him to be a ruddy, close-cropped young man with a blunt straight nose, blue eyes, and a humorous, good-tempered mouth. His tunic was rather shabby and patched with leather, yet the buttons were very bright. His hands were the hands of a workman, but brown and clean and capable.

"Is that you, Jack?"

A voice called him, the voice of his wife.

"Coming—Kiddums."

To John Buchenham that little sitting-

room of theirs seemed the cosiest and warmest spot in all the world. Phyllis had planned it all, from the rose-coloured pile carpet to the soft green cushions on the chairs. It was a very human little room, dainty and sensitive in all its details, full of that delicate femininity that fills a man home from the trenches with awe and delight.

"Have I been long, Little Thing?"

"I've wanted you so much."

She was lying on the sofa before the fire, a brown-haired slip of a woman with very soft grey eyes, the sort of a woman whose seeming helplessness goes straight to a man's heart.

"Well, I've finished with Anstruther; the business is all settled. Nothing to worry about, Little Thing."

He bent over her, took her face between his hands, and kissed her very tenderly. And then he began to talk playfully, almost gaily, knowing that silence can be the saddest thing in the world. She needed cheering, heartening for the ordeal that lay before her, and his manhood spent itself in hiding its own sadness and aping a brave cheerfulness that might help her to be brave.

"There's nothing to worry about, dear. Cicely will be coming to-morrow, and she's the kindest soul in the world. I'm going to see old Bates to-morrow and tell him that he has got to sit here all night, if needs be. As for money—well, I have got a clean hundred at the bank."

He stroked her hair with one of his big, commonplace hands.

"And there's no need for you to worry about me, Little Thing. The old division's in rest, and the winter's coming on, the quiet season. I shall be back on leave in three months. The C.O. is such a sportsman; he half promised to get me home again soon."

And so he talked to her, knowing that he was telling gallant lies and that he would have as good a chance of being killed next week as any officer in France. But he saw her eyes looking up at him with a deep

and trusting tenderness. She thought him so strong, not guessing that he could have laid his head in her lap and wept.

Buchenham went to see their doctor next morning, and caught him just before he was starting on his morning round. Dr. Bates was a rugged little man with a curt manner and a heart of gold. His patients had learnt to like his severity; it was so shrewd, so potent, so kind.

"I don't want your wife worried, young man."

"I've not been worrying her."

"That's good. She is rather a fragile, sensitive subject."

"I ought to know that, Doctor. You mean that if she had bad news—"

"Exactly. It is absolutely imperative that she should not have bad news."

Buchenham gulped down his emotion.

"I see. An offensive is expected next week, Doctor, and we are in it; but I haven't told her."

Old Bates looked at him keenly and very kindly.

"You can't get out of it, boy. No, of course not. Damn this infernal war! But I like your pluck, Jack; you can rely on me, boy, over here."

Seven o'clock next morning, in the drizzle of an October dawn, John Buchenham left Pevensey Mansions to catch the leave train at Victoria Station. His eyes felt hot, and there was a big lump in his throat. He had had to drag himself away after those last kisses, and the parting had hurt him as he had never been hurt before. Twice he had gone back for a last caress and one last dear word, and he had escaped from the room with a glimpse of the Little Thing burying her face in the pillow and trying to smother her sobs.

"Oh! damn—damn everything! Why should she have to suffer?"

He noticed nothing as he hurried along, but walked blindly, his whole soul left behind him in that half-darkened little room where his wife lay weeping all alone.

At the station he moved about mechanically in the crowd. He had a feeling that nothing mattered, that he was a dumb and helpless beast being hustled to the slaughter. He didn't want to speak to anybody, and he didn't want anyone to speak to him. He had breakfast on the train, and hated the man opposite him, a cheerful, rosy doctorman who was returning to a comfortable post at a base hospital, and who

ate his breakfast as though he had never enjoyed any meal so much in his life before, and who showed an irrepressible desire to talk. Buchenham gave him a few curt monosyllables that checked his ardour, and spent the whole journey staring out of the window and watching the autumn landscape slipping past him like a dream.

A man may return to France like a sleek, full-blooded animal that has had every appetite satisfied, sensually complacent and without regrets. There were men on the boat with Buchenham who looked as though they had bathed in red wine and embraced many women. But there were many who were very silent and very sad. They had been free men for ten days; they had seen the faces of those who were dear to them. Now they were being thrust again into the unknown, to be made the sport of some other man's insolence or ambition. The familiar faces of their womenfolk had melted once more out of their lives.

Buchenham sat beside a little artillery officer who had been married a week ago. The boy was miserable and worried.

"I wonder how much longer this infernal war is going to last?"

"God knows."

They fell into immediate sympathy and began to talk. The artillery officer was wondering whether his battery was in the same position. "Hell's own hole," he called it. "Nothing but mud and shells. If they are in the same place I have a feeling that I shall stop one with my name on it." Buchenham understood.

"We are due for a stunt. I wish to blazes I could sneak out of it, but I can't. So rotten for the women at home."

They chummed up together, stayed at the same hotel in Boulogne that night, and shared the dreary adventures of the following day, interviewing bored R.T.O.'s, and finding themselves sent in the wrong direction. Their destinations proved to be identical, and both these youngsters had serious faces when they had spoken with the gentleman who sat in an office at the place where they detrained.

"My battery hasn't moved."

"And my division is going into the line."

They looked at each other significantly. The cobbled road in front of them was awash with liquid mud and crowded with dejected Tommies.

"No luck! Let's go and get some tea at the Officers' Club."

THREE LIVES

"Good idea. It's the last time we shall see a clean table-cloth for quite a long time."

It was dark and raining when John Buchenham plodded into a muddy camp, and found his battalion huddled in wet tents. Men were sloshing about and crowding up to the field-cookers, for they had been on the road all day and had only just arrived. Buchenham found the officers of B Company sitting round a tent-pole eating bully and bread and margarine, with bits of newspaper to serve as plates.

"Hallo — Buch, old man!"

"Cheer-o!"

"Just in time, old chap. Sit down and have some dinner. Seen the C.O.?"

"Not yet."

"Very peevish. The Adjutant's gone sick, and we've lost two Lewis guns. Well, how's Blighty?"

"Oh—much as usual."

He was tired, depressed, and there was an artificial cheerfulness about these youngsters that added to his depression. He knew so well the meaning of the mood. Someone handed him a tin of bully and some bread, and he unslung his pack and sat down on the floor-boards.

"Any news?"

He tried to make his voice sound casual.

"News! We're for it, Buch. We go in to-morrow night, sit tight for two days, and then go over the top."

Buchenham stuffed a crust of bread into his mouth and bit hard upon it.

"I expected as much."

All he saw for the moment was his little wife burying her wet face in the pillow.

Buchenham slept badly that night, lying in his clothes on the same floor-boards of the tent, with his pack for a pillow. The same thought kept passing to and fro through his mind, like a sentry guarding a



There was a sense of hard breathing all down the line

post: "I must get through—I must get through. It may mean three lives—not one."

He awoke from a half-sleep at réveillée, and turned out into the mud. The camping ground had once been a green meadow, but it was pock-marked with old shell-holes and had been trampled into a sheet of black slush. A few mutilated trees stretched out their dead branches along one side of it, and in the near distance a row of ruined houses made a jagged outline against the grey of the dawn. The cooks were lighting trench fires under the dixies. A depressed murmur of many voices came from the sodden tents.

Buchenham lit a cigarette and strolled up and down. He felt cold and strangely afraid, with a plaintive, chilly fear that was quite new to him. Never had he hated anything so much as he hated that dirty camp and the men who filled it. The sordid horror of the whole war stuck in his throat as his thoughts went back to the warmth and the delicacy and the soft colourings of the home he had left but yesterday. What

was the use of it all? When was it going to end?

A brother officer emerged from a tent and hailed him. "Hallo, Buch!—nice sort of place—what!"

Buchenham smiled drearily.

"Just the usual sort of entrance to hell."

A kind of apathy descended on him as the day wore on, and he found himself carrying out his duties by the mere suggestion of habit. The battalion was to parade for the trenches that night, and rifles and Lewis guns had to be inspected and equipment overhauled. About three in the afternoon the C.O. called the company commanders together and held a pow-wow that lasted an hour.

Buchenham met Craigie, the captain of B Company, coming down the lines with a worried face. Buchenham had been waiting for him, knowing what these pow-wows portended, how a man's fate was weighed in the balance, how life and death hung on someone's whim.

Craigie was a kindly soul without much strength of character. He seemed to have some difficulty in meeting Buchenham's grave eyes.

"Any news?"

"Of sorts. The C.O. had everything cut and dried. Sorry, old chap, but you are to take the company over the top."

Buchenham felt an icy thrill go through him.

"I see."

"I tried to get the old man to let me do it, but he seemed to have fixed on you. I told him about—about your wife—you know."

"Yes."

"He got peevish at once and said that soldiers could not be hampered by such sentimental tosh, and that a Tommy could not get out of a stunt even if his wife were having ten babies."

Buchenham's mouth hardened.

"I'm much obliged to the C.O. I think his wife divorced him, didn't she? I'm not out to sulk, Craigie. Damn it! I'll take the company over, but I wish the whole business was over and done with."

He went aside by himself and walked up and down for a while with a fierce, tense face. Now that he knew his fate his manhood rose to meet it with a quiver of savage pride. He no longer thought of expecting consideration from a man who had played the blackguard in his own home life. Sentimental tosh! God! Were a woman's tears

nothing to this professional beast who could not do a thing kindly even when it meant anguish and death.

Buchenham's eyes had a hard light in them. And somehow he managed to put the softer things out of his heart. All the way up to the trenches that night he kept repeating those two words—"sentimental tosh." And in his heart of hearts he counted himself as dead.

Two days passed, and about five o'clock on a misty autumn morning John Buchenham found himself standing on a white tape with his men strung out on either side of him. It was still dark and strangely still, and Buchenham, as he kept glancing at his radium watch, could hardly believe that the affair was real. The battalion had lined up on the tape with scarcely a hitch. In front of them stretched a wilderness of shell-holes, muddy pits set so close that there was hardly a foot of sound soil between them.

The barrage was due in five minutes, and Buchenham was attacked by a sudden restlessness, a restlessness so acute that it was akin to pain. He felt like a man stretched on the guillotine, waiting for the knife to fall. He wanted to go plunging forward into that damnable morass, get the thing done with, find oblivion, challenge fate. His wife's face had grown very dim. The real, warm-blooded, human man seemed to have died in him. He was just a wretched, shivering ghost waiting to pass over to the other world.

Four minutes — three minutes — two minutes.

The teeth of the man next to him were chattering like castanets. Someone was whimpering. There was a sense of hard breathing all down the line.

One minute.

Then with a massed and simultaneous hammering the guns opened, the shells screaming close over head and building a barrage in front of the waiting infantry. Buchenham pulled out his revolver, glanced right and left, and then walked straight forwards towards the froth and flash of bursting shells. There was no answer as yet from the German guns, but Buchenham knew that it would come, a fiery curtain of death flung in the faces of the advancing men.

Few soldiers can give a connected account of such an attack launched in the grey of the morning, over ground that has

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been ploughed by shell-fire into a sea of tumbled earth. The affair went well enough at first, but before the battalion had advanced two hundred yards it found itself caught in the German barrage and enfiladed by machine-gun fire from the right flank. Inevitable confusion followed: the brown line seemed to melt away; men were hit, others straggled, a few pushed forward among the bursting shells. Not a single Boche had been met, alive or dead.

Buchenham had gone on blindly, facing the full horror of the affair with the apathy of a fatalist. And suddenly he found himself almost alone, and the next moment he was hit.

How he got into the bottom of that shell-hole he never knew. It was a very deep and fresh hole, dry for the moment, its walls of sticky, yellow clay, and John Buchenham lay at the bottom of it with his heels higher than his head. His steel helmet showed a big dent on the crown, and his left foot flopped at an impossible angle, and puttee and boot were red with blood.

Buchenham lay and stared in a dazed way at that foot of his. It was obvious that there was something very wrong with it, and the sight of his own blood fascinated him. For the moment he felt no pain, only a queer numbness. How long he had lain there he could not tell, for he found that his wrist-watch had been smashed, and the hands stood at ten minutes past five. Very few shells were going over; the artillery fire had almost ceased.

The dazed feeling passed away. He noticed that the red stain was not spreading down his puttee, and suddenly he seemed to realise that he was safely wounded—that it meant Blighty—home. He had only to climb out of this hole, get hold of some of his men, and find himself safely on a stretcher.

It was as though life had come back to him: a savage and eager desire to live, an energy that was inspired both by hope and by despair. Using his hands and his sound foot he worked himself into a sitting position, sweat on his forehead, his teeth clenched. For that smashed foot of his hurt most damnably directly he moved. Slowly and in great anguish he turned himself over and started to crawl out of the yellow hole.

Not till then did the horror of his position dawn upon him. The walls of the crater were steep and crumbling, and some eight feet high, and each time he tried to claw

his way out he slid back helplessly with a scattering of soft earth. In fact he was like a beetle in a teacup, and that dangling foot of his hurt like hell.

For the best part of half an hour John Buchenham tried to crawl out of that shell crater, only to find himself still lying at the bottom of it, sweating with exhaustion and pain. He tried shouting, but no voice answered his. And then he realised that he was lost, abandoned in that wilderness of shell-holes, unable to escape, a doomed man unless he was found by some patrol.

He lay back and stared at the sky, and suddenly there came to him a vivid memory picture of his wife hiding her wet face in her pillow. The whole imminent tragedy challenged him. He would be reported wounded and missing. One of those fatal telegrams would be sent to her. He could see her reading it, imagine the disaster that might follow. For she was such a little thing, so sensitive and easily hurt. And old Bates had warned him of what might happen.

"Good God! I must get back."

He had his water-bottle and his iron ration, and he drank and made a meal with the idea of husbanding his strength for a final effort. Once more he tried to claw his way out of that infernal pit, paddling desperately with his hands like a dog swimming; but the loose, crumbling soil gave him no purchase, and he slid back at last to the bottom of the crater, beaten and exhausted.

And then he burst into tears, the bitter, poignant tears of a strong man in anguish. He had been abandoned—left to die. It was the end, and his heart cried "*Explicit!*"

John Buchenham lay there for hours, tortured in body and in soul, paralysed by his own sense of utter helplessness. A great silence had descended on that world of shell craters; he could hear neither the snap of a rifle nor the sound of a voice, only the distant boom of a gun. Once an aeroplane passed low across his circle of grey sky, and disappeared like a bird of prey. Then it began to rain, a steady, penetrating drizzle, and the dry shell-hole filled at the bottom with a yellowish ooze. The puddle increased till Buchenham was half lying in it; yet this last misery was nothing compared with his anguish of mind. He saw himself reported wounded and missing. He pictured the casualty wire being sent and the Little Thing reading the message. God!

If he could only stop it; let them know! Once again, as the dusk came down, he made another struggle to escape from that open grave, only to fail, and to slip back, cursing and weeping, into the yellow water at the bottom.

Night came, with the occasional and distant chatter of a machine-gun, and exhaustion gave John Buchenham some hours of sleep. He slept so heavily that the renewed thunder of the English guns did not awaken him nor fill him with a shudder of hope. He knew nothing of those long, silent infantry files crawling like caterpillars to the assembly line, men of his own division, ready to renew the attack.

About dawn Buchenham was roused by a mess of earth and water being flung over him. A shell had burst just beyond the lip of the crater, torn a gap in it, and thrown down a part of the yellow wall. The barrage of the new attack had passed over the place where Buchenham lay, and this chance shell had broken the wall of his prison.

He started up, and sat listening. The stream of shells passing overhead sang a song that he understood. The shell-hole had been half filled with earth, and showed a slope up which it was possible for him to crawl. A whisper of hope went through him. Wet through, muddy, yellow-faced, he clawed his way up that bank of earth in time to see a line of brown figures going past him in the grey of the dawn.

And such a dawn, all wet and yellow in the east above a fog of smoke and earth and flying mud. Buchenham squatted on the edge of a shell-hole, his face turned towards the English lines. And suddenly he began to shout and to wave his hand like a man adrift on a piece of wreckage.

They saw him, did those two stretcher-bearers, and came along stumbling in his direction.

"All right, old pal!"

They were very hot and very excited, and seemed to think it their duty to try and dress his wound.

"Never mind the damned thing. Just get me back, lads. I've a message."

"Been lying out since yesterday, sir?"

"Yes."

They got him on the stretcher and started back towards the lines. It was a devil of a journey, swaying along on the edge of shell-holes, with the Boche shells kicking up the mud behind them. But the two stretcher-

bearers were stout men and they carried Buchenham through.

Three hours later he was in a motor ambulance on his way to a casualty clearing hospital. The doctor man at the dressing station had sent him on direct. And all the way Buchenham sang to himself like a man who had drunk good wine.

But at the casualty clearing station they found him truculent. "I want to send a wire. I've got to send a wire. Never mind about that damned foot. They'll have reported me wounded and missing. I've got to send a wire to my wife."

He was so excited and so fierce over it, and so determined not to be touched before he had eased his soul, that they humoured him and made him happy.

"All right, old man. We'll wire your C.O."

"And my wife?"

"Of course. Here's our padre; he's a great man at this game."

A big, beaming Roman Catholic chaplain came and knelt beside the stretcher, notebook on knee, pencil ready.

"Now then, my dear boy, what can I do?"

Buchenham stretched out a muddy hand.

"Padre—God bless you!—unless I get a wire home it may kill my wife. You see, she's such a little thing, and she's—she's expecting our child."

The padre nodded his head.

"I'll see to it. Don't you worry. Now, what shall I say?"

Buchenham thought a moment.

"Say 'Slightly wounded. Doing splendidly. Home soon—for a long time.'"

That wire went on its way and reached the Little Thing the very evening before her boy was born. Its effect was miraculous. Old Bates had never dealt with a more comfortable case.

A month later John Buchenham saw his wife. He was lying in the officers' ward of a big London hospital, minus a foot, and some thoughtful soul had put screens round the bed.

The Little Thing had her head on the pillow beside his.

"I'm out of it for good, dear."

"Oh, how happy I am! You'll never have to go back?"

"They tell me not. But I shall be quite fit to do something for you and that most wonderful infant. No, I don't want to talk, you Little Thing; I just want to lie and look at you."

Frankel

Story Teller MAY 1917

The Conscientious Objector

By Warwick Deeping

"With sudden and mutual enthusiasm Lane Foot and Greasy Face throw themselves upon the professor, and the professor, true to the natural instincts of the normal man, resisted them with vicious courage. All his theories were torn to tatters in his scuffle with these two fellow-individualists."



ACK DENNISON turned his Canadian canoe into one of the many side channels of the Loddon River. There was an island here, a place of green shadows, thick with willows and poplars, the water lying still and black and sheltered from the wind, while purple loose-strife and willowherb bloomed among the reeds and flags that made a jungle along each bank. Tall woods clasped the sweep of the river with great green arms. There were little water-meadows between the woods and the Loddon, where the hay still waited to be cut.

Dennison rested the paddle on the gunwales and let the canoe glide on over the patterning of water weeds. He looked up at the quiet, silvery foliage of the willows and poplars, and his eyes were the eyes of a dreamer. He was one of those big, brown, blue-eyed boys, very strong, very much an athlete, and yet with a quite extraordinary love of the mystery and romance of life and of the solitudes where realities end and the imagination opens its lips. He loved the river, and he loved exploring it alone.

The mess teased him about it, but the mess's playfulness was the playfulness of affection.

"Hallo, John! found any water-nymphs?"

"You'll collide with the Lady of Shalott—some day."

Dennison just smiled at them.

"I'll wrestle you to-morrow, Peter, instead of taking the canoe out."

"No, thanks, old man. You nearly broke my back last time. But we want you to pull for us on Saturday. We have got to lick those gunners."

"All right."

Dennison used that phrase so frequently that the men of his company had christened their officer "Our little bit of all right."

He put in a few more powerful strokes with the paddle, closed his eyes, and let the canoe go where it pleased. It glided on, left the island and the willows behind it, missed a sharp turn, and came to rest with its nose rustling among the reeds and water-fags. Dennison opened his eyes, and lay staring as though at last some magic thing had really happened to him.

Away to his left stretched a narrow waterway not more than twenty feet across. The wilderness of sedges and reeds ceased of a sudden, to give place to the wilderness of a garden. Linked up by a wooden foot-bridge, this river garden poured its colour down to either side of the channel, the whispering willows making a soft background for all its July splendour.

The place was a tangle of roses. They flamed on poles and pergolas, poured over the banks and were reflected in the water, even smothered the trellis-work of the bridge. Dennison had never seen so much colour and so much blossom crowded into so small a space. The soft green of the willows and poplars seemed to render it more vivid, just as a cloud of grey smoke contrasts with the redness of a fire.

He could see no house, for the banks were screened by this tangle of roses. An utter silence prevailed, save for the stirring of the wind in the trees. The water was strewn

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thickly with pink and white petals, as though summer kept carnival in this river solitude.

Dennison became the victim of a sudden curiosity. He was wondering who had created such a garden in this lonely place, who lived here, whether there was a house hidden somewhere behind those walls of flowers. He backed his canoe out of the water plants, set it straight up the channel, and glided noiselessly towards the bridge.

The enchantment developed. The place ceased to be a solitude. Someone appeared on the bridge, someone in a white dress, carrying a basket, a broad-brimmed hat shading her face.

The canoe had almost ceased to move, and Jack Dennison found himself looking up into the dark eyes of a girl. She had paused, as though taken by surprise, one hand resting on the bridge rail, her hair shining in the sunlight. Her face had a beautiful fresh pallor, a pallor that makes dark eyes look deeper and more mysterious.

There flashed into Dennison's head one of those instant and instinctive desires that are part of the charm of youth. He did not want to go disappearing under the bridge like some awkward gawk of a boy, after letting himself look so frankly into the girl's face. He wanted to speak to her, and an excuse served.

"I beg your pardon. I hope I'm not on private water here?"

She seemed to consider him for one critical instant. Her knowledge of men was purely instinctive. She judged Dennison by his voice, his brown face, his steady eyes.

"No."

"Thank you. I was just exploring, and all this was rather unexpected."

He let his eyes wander over the roses, and then come back to her face. She was very grave, with the gravity of a child, but she met his eyes quite frankly, not fearing him in the least or holding aloof from a possible familiarity that might have challenged her pride. Neither did she encourage him; her attitude was dispassionate, unflurried.

"These roses are gorgeous. I suppose you don't mind my going on under your bridge—and up this channel?"

"The river does not belong to us."

"In a sense it does. Such a garden gives you a sort of right."

He began to play with his paddle as though he knew it was time for him to push the canoe on. She was looking at his khaki shirt, and at his cap and tunic lying in the bottom of the canoe. The gleam of innocent interest in her dark eyes persuaded Dennison that he might keep that paddle out of the water for another few seconds.

"Can you tell me if this channel joins up again with the main stream?"

"Oh, no, this is a river of its own."

"It isn't the Loddon?"

"No, the Linnet; it joins the Loddon."

"Then I shall have to do an about turn. I'm at Wenderley Camp. Thank you so much; I might have gone on for miles."

She had assumed a sudden air of detachment, and her eyes no longer looked at him. Dennison conceived it his duty to depart, to turn the canoe, and not to tempt his fortune any farther. Then the sound of another voice strengthened the decision. It was an old man's voice, rasping and dictatorial.

"Betty—Betty—"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"I'm coming."

Dennison dug his paddle into the water, and the canoe glided under the bridge. He turned her there and put her nose down stream, glancing up at the bridge once more for a last glimpse of Miss Betty's dark eyes. But Romance had abandoned the bridge; a swift interchange had been effected. An old gentleman stood up above—an old gentleman with bushy, gray eyebrows, and an odd, unfriendly face.

Dennison stared at him, and the older man stared back. He had a donnish, eccentric air, wore gray flannel trousers, an old blue blazer, and a black straw hat. Thin and hollow chested, his dark eyes were full of little irritable glints of light; his face was the grey, restless face of a scholar and a dyspeptic.

Dennison's soldierly politeness rose to the occasion.

"Good evening, sir."

He was a clean, likeable boy, and

most old men would have smiled down at him, but the man on the bridge was no ordinary mortal. The academic world knew him to be one of the most learned men in Europe. But he was also a crank and a fanatic. His manners were of the quaintest, and utterly disconcerting to average intelligences; he said just what he thought, and since his thoughts were usually cynical and uncomplimentary, his rudeness had won him the reputation of being a brilliant and amazing boor.

"It is a month since I last saw one of these brown fools."

He spoke as though he were soliloquising over a live specimen in a zoo.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

Dennison had stopped the canoe, for the youth in him felt challenged. The professor leant over the bridge rail as though he were questioning one of the students at a lecture.

"You are a soldier, sir."

"Yes."

"Will you truthfully tell me what made you join the army?"

Dennison smiled.

"Oh, yes; I'll tell you that."

"I want the truth. No jingoistical nonsense."

"I joined because I had to."

"A volunteer—and yet you were compelled. What compelled you?"

"Oh, just everything—common sense, decency, to be in with my friends."

The professor jerked himself straight, as though he had received the very answer for which he had been waiting.

"Exactly—to be in with the crowd. For months I have been elucidating the impulses that make men turn themselves into slaves. Humanity has progressed backwards. Men are still sheep—silly sheep driven by a few cunning curs. It is pathetic, monstrous."

Dennison never argued. He smiled tolerantly when other men turned the mess into a debating society; he had that quiet steadfastness that is not easily turned aside, and has no desire to interfere with other men's convictions.

"You don't believe in war, sir?"

"I hope I am a sane man, my young friend. A passionate and universal individualism would have saved the world from this catastrophic folly. Every man

should be an objector, he should be a thinker——"

"You are for intellectual anarchy, sir?"

"Certainly. Mass rule means stupidity, floods of barbarous folly——"

"But——"

"There should be no buts."

"What about self-defence?"

"If all Europe had sat still, the Germans would have been reduced to inertia. Passivity would have conquered them."

Dennison laughed.

"We have not reached your level. We have to do the best we can."

"The eternal excuse. And now, my young friend, I trust that you will find another part of the river more pleasant in future. I have designed this retreat of mine to be fool proof. Good day."

He gave Dennison a sort of grim smile, and, marching jerkily across the bridge, disappeared into the garden.

Dennison paddled his canoe mechanically down stream.

"Well, I'm dashed," ran his thoughts, "how did that furious old freak contrive to have such a daughter! It must be abominably dull there. Passionate individualism! God save us! And khaki is barred. Well, I don't know."

Dennison had discovered his Lady of Shalott, and the irrepressible romanticism of youth inspired him to try and break the spell that surrounded her. Two days later the canoe went up stream again and nearly collided with a little sailing dinghy where the Linnet joined the Loddon. A girl was sculling the dinghy, digging her sculls in deeply and making a goodly splashing.

Dennison had to back water vigorously, but even then the girl's right scull struck the canoe's bows. It was the first warning she had of his presence, and her startled face was a study in sudden colour.

"I'm so sorry."

"Nobody's fault. It is rather a sharp turn here, and there's no damage done."

She had recognised him, and her eyes grew friendly.

"I haven't done much sculling yet. I thought I might be able to bail down here, but there isn't a great deal of wind."

The Conscientious Objector

Dennison was stealthily working his paddle so that the canoe edged close to the dinghy.

"Can you sail?"

"A little. There is a centre-board, and the sail is quite small. Father won't let me take the boat out when there is much wind."

"So he does trouble to worry about you," thought Dennison.

And then a sudden shyness fell on both of them—that mysterious shyness that is the beginning of a lover's curiosity. They looked at each other with tentative interest, dinghy and canoe drifting down stream together, while their occupants made polite conversation.

"That's a unique garden you have got up there. Did you make it?"

"Partly. Father had it made; he loves flowers."

"Isn't it rather lonely?"

She glanced at him as though he had touched her, and then stared across the river.

"Oh, I don't know—sometimes. Father has to have solitude. We have our tiny cottage, and one servant. In the winter we go abroad."

"Where I shall be soon."

Her eyes came back to his.

"France?"

"I expect so."

"Isn't it terrible—this war?"

"It is making men of us."

"Father loathes war."

"Yes, we had a short talk about it—the other day."

She flushed up, and her eyes took on a defensive look.

"Father holds very strong views. People don't understand him. If you knew him——"

Dennison put in a clever touch.

"I should like to know him. He's a very original man, and original men are rare. Isn't he Professor——"

"Monkton."

"Of course. I have read one or two of his books; they are unique."

Dennison thought them scholarly, peevish tosh, but one could lie about a professor's work when he had such a daughter.

"Perhaps. But then—of course—of course——"

She was hesitating, and Dennison grew a little more adventurous.

"Of course, we Cambridge men all quote your father. I was at Trinity. My name is Dennison."

"Is it?"

"Yes, Jack Dennison. And you are Betty."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I heard."

She glanced at a piece of ruffled water where a breeze had touched the river.

"Here's a wind. I really must put up the sail."

"I'm afraid it's only a chance puff."

"I'll try."

She had a will of her own, and her shyness had won the mastery. Dennison was chivalrous and quick enough to feel that he would gain more by leaving her than by forcing his way further. He backed the canoe away.

"I suppose I ought to be turning. I wonder if your father would let me see his garden some afternoon. I'm great on gardens."

"Perhaps."

"I hope you will get some wind. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

She gave him a glance that he treasured as he set the canoe down stream.

Of course Dennison made a further expedition to Willow End, and after mooring his canoe in a convenient dyke, made his way across a meadow to a lane, and so in all correctness to Professor Monkton's garden gate. He walked up the path to the cottage with something of the guilty feeling of a boy in a farmer's orchard. An old woman answered the door. He asked for Miss Betty.

The old woman looked at him with astonished eyes.

"You can see the master," she said.

Dennison dared everything.

"If Professor Monkton is in. Here is my card."

The old woman left him standing there. She returned in due course with a kind of solemn smile—a smile that was not unfriendly.

"Will you come this way, sir."

Dennison braced himself for the ordeal.

The professor was lying in a hammock slung between two young lime trees. He had been asleep. The table beside him carried a pipe, a pair of spectacles, and a pile of books.

Dennison eyed his man. If it was

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going to be a battle, he would fight it like a gentleman.

"I'm afraid I am disturbing you, sir."

The professor sat up, and let his legs hang, like a child in a swing.

"Of course. That should be obvious, Mr. Dennison."

He glanced at Jack's card.

"Captain Dennison—I see. Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

Dennison looked him straight in the face.

"I'm a great lover of gardens, professor, and I have read some of your books. You have a very charming garden here."

The professor's eyes glinted.

"Did you come to see my garden, sir?"

Dennison was prompted by a sudden drastic frankness. If old Monkton liked bluntness, he should have it to his good content.

"Yes. But I also came to see your daughter."

"Indeed."

"What could be more natural?"

"Ah—is that so? That is a very straightforward statement."

"I have nothing to be ashamed of, sir, in making it. More especially to you, sir. Can you find any fault with it?"

Professor Monkton eyed Dennison like a wise and startled bird.

"Hum. There is an elemental veracity about you, Mr. Dennison, that is somewhat original. Let us discuss this matter calmly, philosophically. You ask me if I can see any objection in your wishing to see my daughter. I will ask you, why do you wish to see my daughter?"

"I will answer it by asking you, sir, why you wished, in the beginning, to see her mother. I don't mean to be impertinent, professor."

"A perfectly legitimate and illuminating answer. May I ask, Mr. Dennison, how often you have seen my daughter?"

"Twice."

"And upon so slender a foundation, you are ready to build—"

"No, sir. I am merely asking you to let me start building a foundation. There must be a beginning. I have not made a secret of it; I have come straight to you."

The professor nodded.

"I grant that. But what do I know of you, Mr. Dennison? Remember, all this is hypothetical."

"I was educated at Winchester and Trinity. I took a first in the Science Tripos. The Dennisons are big manufacturers; I had joined my father as scientific experimental partner. I draw a thousand a year. Now I am a captain in the 20th Homeshires. We expect to go to France."

The professor twiddled his thumbs.

"A very good record," he said presently; "and it appears to me, Mr. Dennison, that you have a gentlemanly courage. As to your wishing to see more of my daughter, the thing would seem reasonable, but—I have views of my own."

"May I hear them, sir?"

"Certainly, seeing that they will compel me to ask you not to come here again. I do not approve of collectivism, of war, of organised violence. You may think me prejudiced, Mr. Dennison; I stand by my convictions. I disassociate myself utterly from all this madness. I will most certainly not let my daughter conceive an affection for a man who is, or has been, a soldier."

Dennison looked naively astonished.

"Then, what—is she to marry, sir?"

"Need a woman marry?"

"No. But she should have the right of choice. I think you are unreasonable, sir."

"I am logical, Mr. Dennison, in order to correct the illogical nature of our human affections."

He stood up.

"And now, Mr. Dennison, I have given you my answer. I must ask you not to come here again. My daughter is playing tennis somewhere; she will not be back till late. My servant has gone to the village to shop; she was going when you came. I will do myself the pleasure of seeing you to my gate."

Professor Monkton had not been so suave and debonair for years, and he succeeded in being utterly chilling. Dennison found himself inarticulate, though rebellious. He was led to the gate, and shown out into the lane.

"Good day, Mr. Dennison; I trust you will survive the great superstition."

"And I, sir, would be proud to die for it. You might not have your garden or your daughter but for the fools behind the guns."

The Conscientious Objector

Dennison retreated down the lane, but he did not go farther than the field gate that hung recessed in an opening through an old thorn hedge. Across the meadow his canoe lay waiting in the dyke, but Dennison had no intention of taking to the water. The spirit of rebellion was awake in him. He meant to wait under that hedge to see Betty.

A very refreshing farce was developing itself, a kind of game of blind man's buff, or catch me who can. The professor had returned to his hammock, taken up his book, and was compelling himself to read. Mrs. Knocker, his servant, had gone to Reedham to pay the books and to do the weekly shopping; Betty was playing tennis a couple of miles away, while Dennison lay in the grass under the hedge, where he was hidden from the professor's garden. But he was not the only man in hiding. A little, triangular-shaped wood sent down a corner to meet Mr. Monkton's wire fence, and this bit of woodland had served as a caravanserai for two days to two genuine, old-time tramps. They were beyond the military age, and the war-labour-machine had not swept them in; they had retained their characteristic grime and dishevelment. One was tall, hairy, and had a lame foot; the other was a little round bouncing ball of a man with twinkling eyes and a sallow, greasy face. They had camped in a clump of hazels, boiled their billy, slept, done a little surreptitious fishing, and helped themselves to the professor's fruit in the early hours of the morning. But they contemplated helping themselves to something more valuable. Greasy Face had been lying on his stomach watching the cottage gate, and had wriggled his way back to take counsel with his comrade.

"The old bloke's all on his lonesome, Jim. The young gal's gone, the old 'un 'as follered 'er, and that young officer chap didn't stay long."

"What's the hour?"

"'Bout six, I guess."

Lame Foot meditated a moment.

"Where's the old gent?"

"Dunno."

"Pinchin' on the sly suits me. Suppose we scout up through the back garding? I ain't one for violence. If we runs up against the

old gent we'll pitch a tale, get a funk on him, and make 'im turn 'is pockets out."

"I'm on."

"There ain't no 'hurry. Got a match left?"

"Yus."

Meanwhile Jack Dennison had grown restless, and had climbed back over the gate into the lane. He had remembered that Betty might be cycling, and he did not want her to slip by before he could signal to her. His wrist-watch made the time half-past six.

Another quarter of an hour passed. The lane ran straight for another hundred yards or so, and Dennison watched it like a sentry from his recess under the hedge. A figure in white came suddenly into view. It was Betty.

He waited till she was within twenty yards before he showed himself, his right hand going to the peak of his cap. She gave him a startled flash of the eyes, stopped her machine, and dismounted.

"You—here?"

She had flushed up most adorably.

"Yes, don't think me a cad. I wanted to see you. I called on your father this afternoon."

"Oh—"

"Well, you see, I wanted to be frank about it. We had a discussion. He ended by telling me that I was not to come here again."

Her face still retained its rich colour.

"But what did you ask him?"

"I told him I wanted to know you. I told him all about myself. You are not cross with me, Betty?"

She looked at the ground.

"No. I think you were quite right. Of course— But what objection—"

"Your father does not approve of war—and soldiers."

"I know he doesn't. But I don't see—"

"Nor do I."

Meanwhile matters were working to a dramatic climax in the Willow End garden. Lame Foot and Greasy Face had insinuated themselves between the strands of the wire fence, worked cautiously through a plantation of young trees, and across the orchard to the rose garden. At the end of the rose garden they came suddenly upon the professor lying in the hammock under the lime trees

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and reading a controversial book that had exasperated him very seriously.

The tramps stared at the professor, and the great man stared at them.

Lame Foot began with diplomacy. "Beg pardin', guv'nor, me and my mate be the wictims of this 'orrid war. Couldn't make hanybody 'ear in the 'ouse. I ain't tasted meat for ten days."

The professor glared.

"Best thing that could happen to you. You've no right here. Get out."

"Give us a little something, guv'nor."

"Not a stiver. Get out, do you hear?"

"You ain't no Christian, guv'nor."

"Get out."

The professor sat up menacingly, contradicting all his theories in his attitude towards these vagabonds. The peaceful passivity that he wished to see cultivated by the nations failed to dominate him as it should have done.

"How dare you come trespassing in my garden and trying to beg. Clear out, or I'll put you in the hands of the police."

Lame Foot gave an ugly grin.

"Want work, guv'nor. There ain't no policeman within call; there ain't nobody within call. We've bin askin' yer politely. Stump up a quid."

The professor's eyes began to blaze.

"What—you threaten——"

"We wants some money, and we'll get it."

"You'll go to——"

With sudden and mutual enthusiasm Lame Foot and Greasy Face threw themselves upon the professor, and the professor, true to the natural instincts of the normal man, resisted them with vicious courage. All his theories were torn to tatters in his scuffle with these two fellow-individualists. The professor was both wiry and very angry, but Lame Foot and Greasy Face were adepts at a rough-and-tumble. They soon had Professor Monkton flat on his back, and were ready to rifle his pockets.

But the professor kicked, and wriggled, and started calling for help.

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"Bung yer cap in 'is mouth, Jim."

"Shut it, guv'nor, or I'll knife yer."

In the green lane Betty looked at Dennison with startled eyes.

"Oh! what's that?"

"Someone shouting for help."

"It must be father. Perhaps he's fallen in the river. Do come."

She dropped her bicycle and ran down the lane with Dennison at her heels. He passed her before they reached the gate, and, catching one of the professor's angry but half-smothered yells, he turned and waved her back.

"Stay there, Betty."

She hesitated.

"I'll call you if I want you. Stay there—under the laurel."

She trusted the man in him, and Dennison ran on. Rounding the cottage he came with dramatic suddenness upon the scene of the conflict. Greasy Face was sitting astride the professor's chest, and pinning his arms to the ground, while his lame friend emptied the great man's pockets.

They had their backs to Dennison, and he was on them before they realised that a rescue was at hand. Dennison caught Lame Foot by the coat collar, whirled him round, and let him collide heavily with one of the lime trees. Greasy Face was up, and ready with a boot that Dennison dodged, and Greasy Face went down with a punch on the chin. Dennison had to floor both of them twice before Greasy Face took to his heels and went bounding for the woodlands with extraordinary activity. Lame Foot was sitting on the grass, dazed, and mopping a red nose with a dirty coat sleeve.

The professor had risen, his collar torn open, his hair over his eyes. He was still intensely angry.

Dennison did not stare upon his discomfiture, but walked over and stood by Lame Foot.

"What would you like me to do with this, professor?"

"Such violent ruffians must be in the hands of the police."

"And meanwhile, sir?"

"Lock him up. There is the coal-cellar."

"Very well. Get up, William. Will you show me the coal-cellar, sir?"

"I will."

The Conscientious Objector

So Lane Foot went into the coal-cellar, and the key was turned on him after Dennison had told him with ungentlemanly frankness what would happen to him if he tried to escape. The professor had gone to his dressing-room to put on a clean collar, brush his hair, and set his dignity in order. Dennison called to Betty, and gave her the news in a whisper.

"It's all right; don't be frightened; two tramps were trying to rob your father. One's in the coal-cellar, the other ran away."

"Of course father did not resist?"

"On the contrary, I think he had been making quite a sporting fight of it."

There was a vague hint of laughter in her eyes.

Dennison and Betty were sitting on the lawn when the professor reappeared. He had the air of a man who was meditating, and the anger had gone out of his eyes.

Dennison stood up.

"I hope you are not hurt, sir. Would you like me to go over and tell the police?"

"One moment, Captain Dennison. There is no immediate hurry."

He glanced at Betty, and Betty suddenly remembered that she had left her bicycle in the lane.

When she had vanished the professor turned to Dennison.

"Sit down, Mr. Dennison. I suppose I am obliged to you. But I should like to know how you happened to be near enough to bring me such prompt assistance?"

"I'll be quite frank with you, sir. I waited in the lane for your daughter. I wanted her to know that you had forbidden me to see her again."

The professor did not press the matter. He twiddled his thumbs and stared up into the green shadows of the lime trees. His face had softened, and taken on an expression of humorous humility.

"This affair has been rather a shock to me, Mr. Dennison."

"You mean—this attack on yourself, sir?"

"Yes."

"It's just what happened in Europe a year ago."

"You detect an analogy?"

"In a way, sir. Insert Germans for tramps—"

"And call myself Belgium! I

have to confess, Captain Dennison, that I resisted these ruffians, that I even kicked one of them."

"Well, sir, I respect you all the more for it."

"Indeed."

The professor pondered the whole question for a while. Then he said:

"It is possible, Mr. Dennison, that I may have to revise some of my theories. I failed in consistency; I acknowledge it. Your action was perfectly honest and natural. I appreciate it. I think, perhaps, I will withdraw my objection. You can come and see me and Betty."

Dennison flushed up.

"That's very good of you, sir, and very magnanimous. I assure you—"

"Say no more, Captain Dennison. Supposing we let that rascalion go; you punished him sufficiently. And perhaps you will stay to supper?"

"Of course, sir, I shall be delighted."

"Then perhaps you will go and let that scoundrel out of the coal-cellar. And tell him I shall communicate with the police to-morrow."

"I'll see that he clears out, sir."

A full moon was shining when Dennison crossed the meadow to embark in his canoe. Betty had come to the gate with him, and had been persuaded to wander a little farther. Her eyes looked very dark and mysterious in her pale face.

"So father has made friends?"

"He has behaved like a fine sportsman. He is a great man. He says I may come and see you. May I?"

"If you want to."

"Of course I want to. There's nothing else I want so much."

She looked at the moon.

"What a perfect night. Won't you be very late, Jack?"

He held her hand a moment, and then got into the canoe.

"What does it matter? I don't want to go to bed—at all to-night."

She asked him a seemingly irrelevant question, but it went deep into his heart.

"You won't have to go out—to France—just yet?"

"No, not just yet."

"I'm so glad."

WARWICK DEERING.

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Within the Swirl

A SERIES OF GREAT STORIES OF THE WAR

IV.—THE TWO BOMBS

By WARWICK DEEPING

THE 53rd Borderers marched into Beaucourt through the wind and sleet of an unkindly April day. The men were tired and wet, but well content, for the battalion was out for a month's rest in a French town twenty miles behind the lines. The regimental band went ahead of them, and the blare of the brass instruments brought girls and old men and children into the streets. The Tommies looked at the girls and the estaminets and the little shops, and forgot the trenches and the Boche shells.

"Bong for the troops, Chummy."

"Not half. Could finish the blinkin' war here."

"Wonder if they've got any bloomin' beer."

"Look at them barrels, old dear, astride that little 'drink me quick' over there."

"Tar barrels, I think."

"Tar barrels be blowed! Red wine, my boy."

Beaucourt was a hill town, its streets winding down into the murk of woods and the shcen of meadows. The spire of its church seemed to prick the clouds. And somehow the little town had kept itself free from the squalor and ugliness and materialism of the war. It smelt of herbs and hayfields and the quiet days of long ago.

Captain Francis Sherringham, having seen to the billeting of "A" Company, went in search of his new home. He had noted down the address, "Madame Cordennier, 15 Rue de Guise," and the second lieutenant who had acted as advance and billeting officer, had told him where the Rue de Guise lay.

"Go into the square and past the church. Take the street by the big inn, the Toison d'Or. The Rue de Guise is about the second on the left, planted with trees, no shops. Your

place stands back in a sort of courtyard. Quite a *bon* spot."

Sherringham did not hurry, for the sky had cleared and the west was splashed with primrose light. The spire of the church pointed to a green zenith. The old houses, blinking with a few lights, were smothered in the dusk and looked like ancient buildings sketched in sepia. And Sherringham felt no desire for hurry. The day's work was done, and there was a whimper of spring in the air, and he was in one of those rare moods when the conventional self falls away like a husk and leaves a sensitive surface tingling with new feeling.

For Francis Sherringham was considered to be a conventional man. He was forty, had been married ten years, boasted of having no family, played an average game of bridge, and drank just two whiskies and sodas a day. He looked younger than his age, had steady blue eyes, a squarish, well-tanned face, a pleasant mouth, and an unemotional manner. The war had wrought great changes in him, recreated the man of fifteen years ago, but these same changes still lay hidden under the surface.

The Rue de Guise pleased him, and he loitered along it, glancing right and left at the old French houses. Plane trees and limes spread a network of branches against the gathering glimmer of the stars. The old street was very quiet. There was a hush here, a mystery, a sense of life waiting and watching behind the closed shutters.

Romance!

Francis Sherringham smiled with a flicker of amusement and curiosity. And yet there was credulity yearning in that smile. Romance was not dead; the old French town seemed full of its perfume, of dark hair being combed behind white curtains.

"I wonder what old Margaret would think of the place."

Margaret was his wife.

"She'd be looking for a hospital, and a spot for the dépôt. Oh—Lord!

He found himself in front of No. 15. It was a house with dormer windows, built of brick and stone, framing a courtyard on three sides, and shut off from the street by tall iron railings. A bell clanged on the gate as Sherringham pushed it back. As he made his way across the courtyard he saw the door of the house open. Someone was standing there, holding a lighted candle.

"*Bon soir, madame.*"

"It is Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Yes, madame, I have the honour of lodging here."

Sherringham spoke quite respectable French, and the little old lady in her black dress and white collar beamed at him with satisfaction. She looked very frail and haggard and tired.

"Monsieur speaks French. What a relief, for I have not a word of English. Come in, Monsieur le Capitaine."

"I hope I am not inconveniencing you, madame."

"Not in the least. The house is big, as you see, and there are only my niece, old Jeanette, and myself to live in it."

She closed the door, and led the way along a passage.

"This is our room, monsieur, and perhaps you will like to talk to us now and again. Lucille, dear, Monsieur le Capitaine has arrived."

She pushed open the door of the sitting-room, and Sherringham, standing in the dark passage, saw a yellow square of light like the background of a picture, and in the midst of it a girl seated at a table, mending a pair of gloves. She was a dark girl with black hair that glistened, a soft white skin, and serious, questioning eyes. She did not smile at Sherringham, but bent her head to him very slightly with the air of one who did not make friends very easily. But there was something very piquant about her pale beauty and her air of alert repose. He noticed the whiteness of her hands, her sad mouth, a certain starved look in her expressive eyes, the fine poise of her head, the youthful curves of her neck and cheek.

"Mademoiselle Lucille, my niece, monsieur."

Sherringham bowed to her, and a faint smile flickered up to him from her eyes.

"You are from the trenches, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Yes."

"It is very quiet here."

"It cannot be too quiet for me, mademoiselle. One wishes to forget."

She looked at him quickly and with sudden sympathy.

"To forget. Yes—but sometimes it is not possible. Our loneliness makes us remember."

"Ah—poor—brave France."

He turned away to be shown to his room by madame, and in turning caught the girl's eyes studying him interestedly. Her voice and her youth had thrilled him very strangely.

"Poor Lucille," said madame in a whisper as she guided him upstairs, "the war has taken both her brothers and her fiancé."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

Sherringham felt a spasm of pity.

"Was it long ago?"

"Two years. The youth of France is dead, monsieur; there are no young men to make love. It is very quiet and very sad in Beaucourt."

Ten minutes later Sherringham's servant arrived with oddments of baggage and much noise and energy. And Sherringham fell upon him with sudden impatience.

"Not so much noise, Lamb. And what the devil do you mean by talking to madame like that."

"Like what, sir?"

"Hot water, *toute suite, compris*. Madame is a lady. Cultivate a little humility, sec."

Private Lamb looked at his officer with surprised and stupid blue eyes.

"Right, sir."

"And don't go singing about the house, or I'll sack you."

The servant produced a couple of letters and held them out propitiatingly.

"Post's come, sir."

"Thanks, Lamb. Get my washing things out. And I'll have a complete change, and the new tunic."

Sherringham sat on the edge of the

bed and read his two letters, while Private Lamb unpacked the baggage. The letters were from his wife, and Sherringham read them with a perfunctoriness that had become a habit. Margaret Sherringham had failed to enter the gates of the wonderful and terrible world of the New Youthfulness. She had grown older, more fussily practical, more busy, plainer, less careful about her dress. Romance had not been renewed in her, and when Sherringham went home on leave she met him as a sort of idealised elder sister, a Martha cumbered with much serving. He needed love, and her head was full of statistics, diet sheets, bed socks, and the manufacture of swabs and slippers. He always thought of her now as "poor old Madge." She left him inarticulate, starved, unsatisfied.

"Which pyjamas, sir?"

"Oh—the blue and white striped, Lamb. And I'll wear those silk socks."

There can be a suggestion of romance and gaiety even in a pair of socks.

The officers of "A" Company had decided to dine at the Toison d'Or, and these youngsters knew how to enjoy themselves. Champagne, of course, and a pretty French hostess to serve it and to flirt harmlessly with these English boys. Sherringham, or "Old Sherry" as they called him in the battalion, seemed to have leapt back to the days of his youth. To hear real laughter, to experience the real reckless joy of living, you should go to such a dinner.

But Sherringham did not stay long.

"I'm most confoundedly sleepy. I'm turning in."

And despite their protestations he went off to his billet.

He was in a peculiarly thoughtful mood, and not at all sleepy or inclined for bed. In fact, he felt restless, unsatisfied, full of a yearning for soft and spiritually sensuous things. And coming to the iron gate of the house in the Rue de Guise he stopped abruptly and stood very still, his hands gripping the iron bars.

A voice was singing, a girl's voice, vibrant, full and strangely sad. And in an instant Sherringham's manhood spread its worn wings and soared to meet that voice of hers. He opened

the gate very cautiously so that the bell did not clang, and crossing the courtyard, stood there, under the stars.

"Dear God——!"

He was entranced, enchanted. She was singing "*Mon cœur ouvre à ta voix*" out of *Samson and Delilah*, and the passion of the music, its rapture, its great chords surging beneath her exultant voice, moved him to the depths of his soul. The spring seemed to open its green gates and let in a gush of golden light. Romance came riding through, a young girl, red-lipped, clad in green and crimson, and mounted on a white horse. His eyes felt hot with tears. The common, dusty manhood fell from him like a husk.

Somehow he found himself in the room standing beside the piano and looking into the girl's eyes.

"Please, will you go on singing? And may I sit here?"

"If you wish, monsieur."

"It is like the spring coming. We live the life of savages—you know—we soldiers."

He turned to Madame, who was knitting by the stove and beaming upon them both.

"Madame—have I your permission? It is very good for me to listen to such music."

"It will be good for Lucille herself. Monsieur le Capitaine, for it is sad to sing when no one listens."

So the days passed, and Francis Sherringham went in and out of the old house in the Rue de Guise. Lucille had a favourite seat at a window where she worked and read, and Sherringham would see her bent head lift and her eyes meet his. Sometimes he would loiter under her window, and they would talk, but there were days when a guilty shyness possessed them both, and they avoided each other's eyes.

For Lucille knew that Sherringham was married. He had spoken of his wife, and the girl had guessed that there was no love left in the marriage.

"How sad for him," she had thought, and her eyes had told her of the greenness of the spring.

"He is so young—still. And I—too!"

She would find his eyes fixed on her when she turned from the piano in the evening, eyes that betrayed more than

he dared to tell. For Sherringham was fighting himself. The youth in him had been reborn, the terrible youthfulness that has gambled with death and cries out for life and love, colour and perfume, music and joy. He was intoxicated and trying to persuade himself that he was sane. What harm was there in his loving this girl? He had told her the truth. They were breathing a fleeting perfume, nothing more.

"It is Sunday to-morrow."

She was smiling at him rather sadly as he stood below her window.

"You go to Mass?"

"Yes."

She sighed.

"In France we seem able to think only of those who are dead."

"This unhappy generation."

His eyes lit up with sudden yearning.

"Let me go with you to-morrow."

"You?"

"Why not?"

She coloured and avoided his eyes.

"Do you know what you ask?"

"Perhaps. It will be a sacrament, Lucille."

She gave a little despairing shrug of the shoulders.

"May the good God forgive me. Come—then—if you wish."

Sherringham met her next morning in the doorway of Beaucourt church. They passed in together, and Sherringham saw Lucille dip her finger in the piscina and cross her forehead. He had been bred the dullest of Protestants, but if love cannot teach the beauty of symbolism then is a man lost indeed. Sherringham touched the holy water, crossed himself, and followed Lucille up the shadowy church.

He found himself kneeling very close to her, and his heart was touched as it had never been touched before. She looked such a little thing in her black dress, her head bent, her face hidden by her hands. He knew how lonely she was, how sad and empty her life seemed, and his love caught the solemnity, the perfume and the dim, pathetic passion of that old French church where so many women had wept and prayed.

He touched her arm.

"It is very good for me to be here."

She sighed, and turned her face to his for a moment.

"Can you make me forget? It is not possible. I seem to be one of those to whom God gives nothing but memories."

Her sadness accused him, and he felt ashamed. What right had he to thrust himself in this girl's life when he could offer her nothing but the shadow of love. And yet he felt that life called to them, offering all in the world that youth can hope for and desire.

Mass was over and they walked back together to the Rue de Guise. Sherringham was conscious of an impending crisis in their lives. Love cannot halt at the crossways; it must turn back towards renunciation or go forward into the blaze of its new dawn.

"You have been very good to me, Lucille."

Her dark eyes lifted to his.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it has been good for me to be near you."

She answered him with a tinge of bitterness in her voice.

"Perhaps. But you will go away, your life belongs to other people over there in England."

"I don't know. It is so difficult for me to speak to you, dear; I cannot say what I wish to say."

She flashed out at him suddenly with the impatience of a sensitive child in pain.

"Then say nothing. Oh—it is very humiliating. Why did you come to us?"

They had reached the iron gateway, and she fled from him suddenly into the house, leaving Sherringham standing there, greatly shaken and abashed. Nor did he dare to follow her into the house. For those few passionate words of hers had betrayed the secret of her heart to him, and he hated himself with sudden fierceness.

Turning back towards the Grand Place he fell in with two brother officers, who appeared to regard him as a joke.

"I say—old bird, you might ask us down to your billet—you know."

"A married man, too. Besides, we're bachelors."

Sherringham flared out in a way that astonished them.

"Oh — go to hell. Do you think I would insult a girl by taking you to see her."

He left them staring, for he had held the reputation of being the best-tempered man in the battalion, and making his way out of the town, wandered into the fields, where the river ran softly between green willows. He was angry and utterly miserable, haunted by inward glimpses of Lucille wounded and alone, mocked by a love that had not the courage to be reckless. Everything or nothing; a man

has no right to offer a woman less. She cannot live on beautiful sentiments, thrown half guiltily into her life like a posy of flowers through a window.

At the edge of a wood he lay down on a grassy bank and stared at the sky where the white clouds drifted above the tops of the trees. He lay there for hours,, but no peace came to him, nor could he find any answer to the bitter question of the moment.

Then—by some miraculous chance he saw Lucille herself before him. She came wandering down the path along the edge of the wood, her white face turned to the sky, her hands hanging listlessly as though she were very weary. Sherringham's heart smote him as he looked at her, for he had surprised her unawares and she had no



"Lucille was standing there in the moonlight, her white face turned to the moon"

thought of hiding her sadness. He started up and saw a kind of fear come into her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Lucille——"

"Sorry——"

"I seem to be in your way—always."

She stood looking into the fresh green depths of the wood.

"I did not know you would be here. I wanted to be alone."

"Believe me, it was the same with me. But now—if you will forgive me—I must speak a few words to you. It is better."

She remained mute, hesitating, and he hurried on.

"I don't know whether you care as I care; I have no right—even to ask myself the question. It has been so sweet, so innocent, and perhaps I did

not realise. And now I am going away from you; it is the only thing to be done, and perhaps you will try and forgive me."

Her eyes met his with sudden tenderness and courage.

"Yes—it has been so easy—perhaps it could not be helped. If there is anything to forgive—it—it is forgiven."

On the impulse of the moment he took one of her hands, kissed it, and turned and fled.

Captain Francis Sherringham did not return to the Rue de Guise. He found a new billet in a bedroom over a baker's shop off the Place, and sent his servant for his baggage. It seemed to be the only thing that he could do, though he was more miserable over the doing of it than words can tell. It seemed such a cowardly solution of the problem, such a sneaking off into the darkness.

But the coincidences of life had not finished with Francis Sherringham. He was in one of those deep valleys out of which a man is lifted on the wings of the wind.

It was the time of the full moon when aeroplanes go out at night like great birds of prey and drop death into towns and villages. Beaucourt had not been touched for many months, for it was well behind the lines and had not been marked down as the abiding place of Corps or Army Headquarters. But the indefatigable Hun conceived a sudden spite against this most inoffensive little French town. His bombing planes sailed over it that evening about nine o'clock and sent down their fire from heaven.

Sherringham was strolling to his billet from the mess when he heard the planes droning overhead, and he was standing looking skywards when the first bomb fell. The rending crash and flare of the explosion set his heart leaping with sudden fear. The bomb appeared to have fallen in that corner of the town where the Rue de Guise ran towards the old ramparts, and in imagination he pictured it as having crashed upon that house of the Cordonnier's, the house that held Lucille.

Next moment Sherringham found himself running like a man who has been told that his home is burning.

The town was strangely quiet. Here and there a frightened face showed at a doorway, or a scared figure went running for cover. Other bombs crashed as Sherringham made for the Rue de Guise, but he hardly noticed them, so wholly was he possessed by a finer emotional fear.

Turning into the Rue de Guise he was aware of a gaping house at the corner, and a litter of *débris* half across the road. Farther down, a tree had been hit, torn in half and thrown slantwise against a wall. He ran on. And then a great horror seized him, for he saw that the low wall and iron railings of the courtyard of Madame Cordonnier's house had been thrown forward into the road.

He scrambled over them and looked round him in the moonlight at broken windows and gashed walls. A bomb had fallen here, right in the courtyard of the Cordonnier's house.

And then Sherringham saw something that made him cry out with wonder and exultation. Lucille was standing there in the moonlight, her white face turned to the moon, a tragic silent figure accusing the winged barbarians overhead.

"My God—Lucille——!"

He ran to her, the man and the lover, burning with pity and tenderness.

"Are you hurt——?"

She gave a little cry like one waking from a stupor.

"Oh—*mon ami*——"

He had her in his arms and she clung to him, breathing fast, her face against his shoulder.

"She is dead; they have killed her."

"Your mother——?"

"Yes. She was standing near the window. Oh—*mon Dieu!*—what shall I do. Oh—my little mother——!"

Sherringham held her very close to him. He had forgotten everything else in the world save this girl.

"Lucille, dearest heart. What can I say to you? Come in, dear; there is still danger from above."

She shuddered.

"There is death in the house. But she is not disfigured—the little mother——"

"Leave all to me."

He half carried her into the house and into the room that had been his,

for he guessed that her mother lay dead in that other room.

"Rest there, child——"

She clung to his hands.

"Don't leave me, Francois."

"I'll never leave you, dear. You are mine and I'm yours now—for ever. It's fate. Nothing else matters."

He sat in a chair and nursed her like a child, talking to her softly, trying to comfort her as best he could. All sense of distance had passed, all barriers had been broken down. The tragedy of the night had left love triumphant.

"I must fetch someone to stay with you, dear. All's quiet now."

"Must I have someone?"

"Of course. Is there anybody I can go to for you?"

"Yes, old Mademoiselle Morlaix. She lives at No. 33."

"I'll go."

"Oh—let me come too. Don't leave me."

"We'll go together."

An hour later Sherringham left Lucille sitting with her head resting in Mademoiselle Morlaix's lap. She was a gentle old lady, very quiet and very wise, and she had known Lucille since her birth. It was Sherringham who went into that other room and closed the eyes and covered the face of Lucille's mother.

When the dawn came he was still wandering through the streets of Beaucourt, a man uplifted by a great love, trying to look calmly and honestly at the future.

"It is fate," he said to himself; "how can I leave the child."

And yet the past and its obligations haunted him and filled him with a new compassion for that other woman over the sea.

"Poor old Madge! We have ceased to be necessary to each other—and yet——?"

He went back to his billet and found his man waiting for him. Habits remain even when a man is in love, and Sherringham washed and shaved, put on clean boots, and even chided Private Lamb for not brushing his buttons properly.

Then he wandered down the street to his company mess, and was met in the doorway by a headquarters runner.

The man saluted.

"Telegram for you, sir."

Sherringham returned the man's salute, took the telegram, and glanced at it rather carelessly. But his face grew pinched and sharp of a sudden, and he did not notice young Joyce, his favourite "sub," who stood smiling in the passage.

"Good God——!"

"Not bad news, sir—I hope."

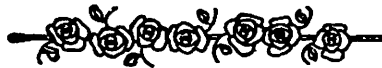
Sherringham stared at young Joyce with eyes that seemed to see nothing tangible.

"My wife's been killed in London by one of those infernal bombs."

"I'm most awfully sorry, sir—it's——"

He faltered, and with one half timid glance at Sherringham's face, slipped softly away.

(Another Story in this series next month.)



LOVE'S COURAGE

Ah, love! the courage you have given me
May bear me far.

Above the dreaming of a peaceful sea
Behold a star.

The sea stirs in its sleep, each little wave
Breaks into foam—

It may be now, ev'n now, the tide is turning
To bear us home

ERIC LYALL.

1919

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What Every Soldier Knows

"Hard work here goes for nothing."

"People are so beastly cynical, you know. I saw Gudgeon to-day. You remember Gudgeon—quite a useful man—in touch with such a lot of people. I had a talk to him about it. He thinks that he could work you a base hospital job."

Percival Bisset frowned slightly.

"A base hospital! It never crossed my mind that I should be asked to do anything less. With my special knowledge of 'hearts,' too."

"Just so."

"I'm thirty-six. I shouldn't be fit physically for an active job. I have no intention of being wasted anywhere else. That's a young man's job."

"Exactly."

So in due course Mr. Percival Bisset received a temporary commission in the R.A.M.C., and spent much time at his tailor's and at other military outfitters'. He was a shrewd young man and something of a dandy, always remembering that a successful physician counts on feminine favour. And since he never contemplated ever going near a shell, he was all the more flamboyant in his military disguise. He appeared in racy riding-breeches, top boots and spurs, and spent his last days in town advertising himself in khaki and making a most gallant show. He practised saluting in front of his dressing-room glass, imitating the languid, *laissez faire* gesture that he supposed to be peculiar to the Guards. And in a moment of exultation he nearly bought a revolver, but changed his mind in favour of a British warm with a nice fur collar.

About a hundred and sixty miles away a man sat in a heavily sand-bagged cellar, reading a letter from his wife. He was a shabby, strong, broad-headed man, with steady, kindly eyes, close-pressed lips, and a square chin. His boots were very muddy and his tunic patched with

leather. On his left breast he wore the ribbon of the Military Cross, a ribbon that had been earned, and not won by truckling.

John Ormsby had been in France for two and a-half years. He was one of those honourable fools who had rushed in, feeling himself late by three days, leaving a hard-won practice to crumble into less honourable men's pockets, and a wife who loved him far more than she loved life and herself. Ormsby was eight-and-thirty, and had married late. For two and a-half years he had played his part in France, learning what fear and courage meant, how great and patient men can be, and how men can come to love each other and hate the swine who shirk. He had spent little and saved what he could, and nearly every day he had sent a letter to his wife. He was what the plain infantryman calls "a brick," which means much in the lingo of the trenches.

Ormsby was reading a letter from his wife. It brought news from home, news that was none of the brightest, yet tempered by the love of a plucky woman.

"The Stevens man came in yesterday. He wants to buy the practice, old Bear. I had been expecting it—as I told you, for he is an ingenious person, and has insinuated himself everywhere. I'm afraid I was rather rude, Jack. I couldn't help it. He offers three hundred pounds, and said he thought the offer generous considering 'the unsettled state of the times!' Oh, my dear, and how we both worked for this little nook of ours! It does seem rather hard and caddish. Can't you get leave and come and talk to these men, Stevens and old Benmerton? You could say things that I can't. I think old Benmerton has some decent feeling about things, but Stevens is one of those polite, pushing, smiling beasts. Utterly selfish. Yes, I'm really feeling very fit, you dearest of men—"

Ormsby sat there frowning in

By Warwick Deeping

the shadows, a big-natured man, bitterly puzzled by other men's meanness. It was all so extraordinary, so disheartening. Men as he knew them in France were of such different mettle. True, he had met a few rotters, the products of the "later squeeze," people who had been pushed into the adventure by public force. And then—his wife was expecting to bear him a child. And that cad had gone and tried to make an opportune bargain.

Ormsby's neck and ears felt hot. Self-sacrifice, indeed; valour—patience! Did the folk over yonder know what war meant?—anguish and bloody sweat, suspense, great gulps of joy, ineffable tenderness, moments of bitter loneliness! He would get home and talk to some of those people. And yet—was it worth it? The men in the line out here were the only men who mattered, and they understood.

"Stretcher case, sir."

A brisk little orderly put his head through a rent in a wall.

Ormsby forgot his own troubles. The dressing-room was a second cellar opening off the medical officer's room. It was surrounded by rough shelves holding dressings, bandages, and splints. The place was lit by acetylene light.

The bearers had just deposited a stretcher on the trestles, and a nursing orderly was slitting up a blood-stained puttee.

"Oh, easy—go easy!"

The lad on the stretcher sent up an appealing wail.

"Can't yer give me somethin' to ease it?"

"All right, son; I reckon we can."

Ormsby had picked up the hypodermic, filled it with morphia, and given the youngster his dose almost before he had asked for it.

"Steady, Somers; there's no hurry! Those are damned bad scissors!"

"Very, sir."

"Try a razor. Just get out of the way. Hold the foot and leg so—that's it."

Anyone who had ever seen Ormsby deal with a bad case admired the man's efficiency. He was so quiet, so quick, so kind, without being mawkish. You felt that this big man gave nothing but his best, that you could trust him implicitly.

"That's it. How's the road, Paynter?"

"Quite quiet, sir; no shelling."

"Ring up for the Ford car to come along."

"I think I hear a car outside now, sir."

A tall man appeared in the doorway of the cellar just as Ormsby had finished dressing the case. The orderlies stood to attention. It was Colonel Carter, Ormsby's C.O.

"Good morning, sir."

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, a quiet day, sir."

"They were shelling Tank Farm as I came along, but the road is quiet. Hallo, lad, what's wrong with you?"

"Bit of shell hit my leg, sir."

"Nice Blighty, eh? You're lucky."

Colonel Carter went through with Ormsby into the medical officer's room, a cell about ten feet square. Carter was a tall, lean man, tough as leather, with shrewd, kind eyes, and a very quiet voice.

"Have a cigarette, sir."

"Thanks! Any news, Jack?"

"Well, yes; a letter from home. Some shark is trying to swallow what was left of my practice. And I think I told you that my wife—"

"Yes. I want to get you home on leave, Jack. You know how short we are. We have asked for reinforcements again and again. So some blackguard at home is at the old game?"

"Wanted to strike a bargain with my wife. I want to go home and tell him a few things. It would ease one's soul, anyway."

"By God—yes! I'll get you away, Jack, at the very earliest opportunity. I wish they would boot some of these young men up to us. We have had nearly three

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years in the line, and there are hundreds of men who have never heard the sound of a shell and never mean to—if they can help it. When Hall and Enderby come back to the ambulance I think I can manage to let you away.

"I shall be tremendously grateful. It will cheer up the little wife."

Somewhere away in the realms of peace the staff of No. 2067 General Hospital sat round their dinner-table in what had been the reading-room of a big hotel. It was a particularly comfortable place, and when you were not on duty you could bathe, play golf or tennis, or borrow a horse and go for a ride. There were some twenty officers at the table, and half of them were comparatively young.

The mess was discussing the R.A.M.C. arrangements in the forward area, and displaying a little heat over the discussion, for it was known that reinforcements had been asked for.

"Of course, I'm ready to go—if they want an X-ray specialist up there. I dare say I might be a great deal of use in a shell-hole."

"Same here. But—to expect a trained surgeon to waste himself in a dug-out! Ludicrous, no doubt!"

These discussions and the facetiousness they inspired were very familiar to the older members of the mess. They were periodical and not without an element of humour, seeing that half the members of the staff were assured that they would never see active service. Nor was it expected of them. The real specialists had their own expert work to do, but the cloak of specialist had been enviously enlarged until it sheltered a number of most ordinary medical men.

"It is most absolute rot. Fancy a field ambulance wanting eight medical officers."

"I know all about field ambulances. My brother was in one for three months and got sick of having no medical work to do."

Certain members of the Mess were feeling far from comfortable, and among them Lieut. Percival Bisset, a six weeks' old soldier. Now Bisset was no fool. He had caught the atmosphere of the place, and realised the importance of being classed among the specialists and the irreplaceables. He had attacked the problem in the most pleasant and subtle way by being exceedingly polite to the C.O. and showing a great eagerness to laugh at all his jokes. He had posed as a rattling good fellow, spent money generously, and lost useful sums at bridge.

Unfortunately time had not been in his favour. The new men are usually passed on when someone has to be sent from such institutes as these, and Bisset had not had time to become assimilated, and be recognised as one of the clique. The luck was against him, though he still had some faith in Gudgeon and his own knowledge of "hearts."

An hour after dinner he was warned for the line. The C.O. interviewed him personally, and was as pleasant as any gentleman could have wished.

"I'm sorry, Bisset, but I'm afraid I shall have to send you on. You will have to report to the A.D.M.S. of the 99th Division. Yes, you will leave to-morrow."

Percival Bisset had turned rather white.

"But I understood, sir, I was to be employed at a base hospital."

"Quite so; but I'm afraid there is nothing final about such arrangements. You are quite fit, I suppose."

"Well—no—I'm quite sure I'm not fit for the line. I have been a physician in a busy London practice for seven years. I've had no training, no preparation."

"It is much the same for everybody. Were you passed fit for active service?"

"Well—yes."

The C.O. smiled very slightly.

"Then I'm afraid there is no help for it. Ask the clerk in the office

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to give you all details as to trains, etc. You will have to report to the R.T.O."

And Lieut. Bisset went forth sweating and feeling that he had been grossly swindled.

Two days later Lieut. Bisset reported to the A.D.M.S. of the 99th Division, and so made the acquaintance of a very courteous but quietly caustic gentleman who had neither the time nor the inclination to listen to the confidential confessions of men whom he classed as conscripts.

"I'm sending you to one of my field ambulances — the ambulance that is running the forward area. Of course—at present—you know nothing."

Bisset remarked that he had come to France to serve as a doctor, and the remark appeared to annoy the quiet, iron-grey man in the chair.

"Exactly. Some of you gentlemen come out here expecting to find a sort of little Harley Street waiting for you. That is all very well for people who stay at the bases. Here, my officers have to be soldiers—at least in spirit."

"I can hardly be held responsible for being ignorant, sir, of matters that have never concerned me."

The quiet man gave him a keen look.

"The war is about three and a half years old. Many men overcame their natural ignorance some two or three years ago. I am sending you to this ambulance for a month's instruction. Then, I may have to use you as a regimental medical officer."

Percival Bisset showed his teeth.

"You will excuse me, sir, but I think I shall be wasted."

"I beg your pardon."

"I am a heart specialist."

The A. D. M. S. rose rather abruptly.

"This is the first time that a newly joined officer has had the impertinence to suggest that he is of more value than any of the tried and trained officers who are serving

under me; men who have borne the brunt of the danger and the privations. I have nothing more to say. Captain Clark, see that this officer takes a covering letter to Colonel Carter. Good morning."

Late that afternoon a car deposited Percival Bisset and his baggage at Blue Hell Farm. Now Blue Hell Farm looked far more ominous and terrifying than it really was; it had been smashed and pounded earlier in the war and had grown quieter since the last advance, but it was sufficiently eerie and strange to arouse a feeling of desolation and discomfort in Mr. Bisset. From the very first he created an unfavourable impression. He was sulky and a little scared, and suffering from a sense of insult and of wrong. Cheerfulness and sportsmanship characterise the men whose lives lie in the forward area, and Bisset did not attempt to be cheerful and had never been a sportsman. He was fussy, asked too many questions, and showed immediate disapproval of his new quarters.

Percival Bisset spent a week at Blue Hell Farm. He was quite useless there, and showed no desire to learn the necessary routine duties. His egotism was bored and protesting and most uncomfortably afraid.

Colonel Carter tried to be kind to him, and failed. He pondered Percival Bisset's case, and then sent Captain Ormsby a letter.

"I am sending you up our new man, Bisset. I think he wants a little hardening. Show him the work and take him up the trenches every day. At the end of the week he ought to be able to carry on, and I will send Sgt. Tankerville to look after him. Then I am giving you leave."

Percival Bisset arrived at Paradise House shortly after that letter. His face looked pinched and small under his steel helmet, and Ormsby, who had a big heart, was kind to the new man

What Every Soldier Knows

"You will soon shake down to the life. It is quite a fine life in its way, and the Colonel is an absolute sport."

Ormsby was in great spirits. He wrote that night to tell his wife that he was coming home.

"Isn't it great, little woman? I am so bucked I don't know what to do."

They were bombed that night—no damage done and much noise made. Bisset, wearing his steel hat, sat and shivered in a corner of the cellar.

Ormsby made him drink a good tot of rum.

"Feels a bit strange at first."

The Boche planes went home, and the R.A.M.C. boys, veterans most of them, started one of their sing-songs in the dug-out next door.

Ormsby laughed.

"They are beggars for pluck. Just listen to them extemporising."

"Nineteen fourteen," roared a deep voice; "hats off, gentlemen."

There were loud cheers.

"Nineteen fifteen. Hats off again, gentlemen."

More cheers.

Then a shrill, boyish voice began to chant:

"Nineteen-sixteen, gentlemen.

The Derby Ram, oh, the Derby Ram,
A very fine beast was the Derby Ram.
He butted the bachelors in by the
score,

Though the poor married blighters
got stuck in the door."

More cheers. Ormsby seemed intent on filling his pipe.

"Nineteen-seventeen, gentlemen,

Mr. Tribunal is lord of the land,
If you say you milk donkeys or grow
sprouts on the sand,

He'll give you a nice ticket of leave
To drill with old gents with G.R. on
your sleeve.

Oh! sweet Seventeen,
How clever you've been,
Making munitions with girls of
sixteen."

More cheers. Ormsby lit his pipe.

"Nineteen-eighteen, gentlemen.

Nineteen-eighteen. What ho, here's
Sly Fred,
Crumped into khaki, and swinging
the lead,

Nineteen-eighteen, just give him a
chance

To get N.Y.D.N. in a dug-out in
France."

Ormsby chuckled.

"They're great lads," he said;
"you'll love them."

For three days John Ormsby tried to make something of Percival Bisset, but the new man started his sojourn at Paradise House with a bad attack of "nerves." And cowardice is a powerful corrosive so far as character is concerned, leaving nothing but selfish cunning and all sorts of uncontrolled impulses. Bisset did not wait to "stick it." Moreover, he had picked up a number of hints at the base, and had a shrewd notion as to how the unpleasant parts of active service may be avoided.

He showed a distaste for food, and could not be persuaded to go outside the cellar. For three nights he did not sleep, and looked bear-eyed and peaked of a morning.

"I suppose it's neurosis," he explained quite frankly; "my nerve's gone completely."

He seemed to have no pride.

Ormsby lost patience at last, and coerced him into accompanying him on one of his morning tours of the trenches. And as it happened, they walked into an unexpected Boche hate and became involved in a miniature shell-storm. Bisset had an attack of hysterics in a dug-out off a communication trench that was known as "Sally's Lane." It took Ormsby and the corporal who was with them more than an hour to get him back to Paradise House.

Ormsby 'phoned for a Ford car, packed Bisset into it, and sent him off to headquarters. The car orderly carried a confidential note to the colonel.

"A genuine case of N.Y.D.N., sir, otherwise blue funk. This

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officer will be quite useless up here. He loses all self-control when under shell-fire."

Colonel Carter made some very caustic remarks about his new officer, and having interviewed him and seconded Ormsby's opinion, had a field medical card made out, and then bundled him off to a casualty clearing hospital.

"I suppose they will say I have let him away rather easily," he confessed to Lyle, his adjutant, "but what earthly use is a rotter like that to me. But it's rough on Ormsby, rough on all good men."

At the casualty clearing hospital Bisset discovered that he had dramatic gifts. He refused to walk, twitched and jerked his hands about, and jumped when spoken to.

"Been shell shocked," he explained, "had a horrible experience, nearly blown to bits up the line. My God!"

Next day he went placidly down to the base in a hospital train, feeling that he had fooled that "blighter" of an A.D.M.S.

To Colonel Carter had been left the writing of that letter to Ormsby.

"Sorry, Jack, but I can't relieve you yet. Lyle has to go to the Red Ruin to-morrow. Hall will be back from the Meshires on Monday, and I expect Enderby any day. Then I can manage your leave. We have evacuated the Worm."

Ormsby sighed, and prepared to carry on. He wrote a short and hurried letter to his wife.

"I hope to see you late next week, dear heart. Don't worry, I shall be with you before long."

But Fate and the Teuton arranged it otherwise. Fritz developed sudden frightfulness along the road that afternoon and caught an ammunition party about fifty yards from the Dressing Station. A scared and wounded man came dashing into Paradise House, calling for help.

Shells were bursting on the road when Ormsby went to the doorway to reconnoitre. He could see a wounded man trying to crawl towards the place, while others lay about helpless. It was one of those devilish moments when a man's soul is put to the supreme test.

Ormsby hesitated a moment in the doorway. He knew that his bearers were scared and not relishing the job; he felt it was up to him to lead them. For five seconds he had one short, grim struggle with himself and with the thought that he was going home on leave.

"Come on, boys, some of you."

He ran out and along the road, his right hand over his breast pocket, where he carried his wife's letters. And just thirty yards from Paradise House, a shell killed him.

Colonel Carter heard the news about two hours afterwards, and it aroused an extraordinary and bitter burst of anger in that quiet man.

"Hell! The good men always stick it and get hit. The rotters sneak off and are given safe jobs down behind. If that little worm had been up there in Ormsby's place he would have stuck in the cellar and come to no harm. Good God! and I have got to write to his wife."

As for Mildred Ormsby, her boy and a posthumous V.C. arrived to comfort her some three months later. She had one hundred and thirty pounds a year to live on, and a sacred memory to cherish. But the loneliness——!

It is said that Mr. Percival Bisset is very popular with the nursing sisters at the Base. He is a bachelor and has pleasant manners.

They say, too, that he has made his position very comfortable and secure. "Bisset has been up the line, you know, and was shell shocked. He has done his bit."

He wears a little bit of gold on his left sleeve, and counts as a veteran.

WARWICK DEEPING.

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done

"Funky Phil"

*Demonstrating, once again, that you
never can tell*

By Warwick Deeping



PRIVATE FORDYCE sat in a corner of the support trenches reading a letter that a Cockney corporal had tossed to him with an:

"'Ere, Funk, somethin' from 'ome to make yer snivel."

The corporal was a sneering beast, but it was none the less true that Philip Fordyce was the scorn of B Company, and the shame of his platoon.

A year ago he had been a clerk in an office, a sensitive, bookish youngster, easily bullied, easily awed. And the trenches are no playground for a lad with nerves, a lad who had started badly on a bad day and in bad company. He had come out in a draft, found himself in a rough crowd, conceived a huge disgust for his mates, and longed most horribly to be at home. A gust of high explosive shelling on his first morning in the trenches had sent him bolting from the fire-platform into a dug-out. They had had to drag him out whimpering like a frightened animal.

Fordyce was a marked man. He was demoralised; he had never been able to get a grip of himself. He had tried reporting sick and had been strafed by the doctor; his captain had talked to him bluntly; his fellow-privates called him "Funky Phil." They were a boisterous, untamed crowd, very young and unsympathetic, good lads enough, but caring nothing about psychology. The "wumph" of high explosives made Fordyce all white about the gills, and his eyes were the eyes of an animal longing to bolt into a hole. All the "innards" seemed to fall out of him. His hands would shake so that he was utterly useless with a rifle. Rapid fire at night set his teeth chattering. The "zing" of a bomb made him stand very flat against the parapet. The poor devil was afraid of everything, of his own blind fear, of his comrades, of the aeroplanes that hummed overhead, of the possible mine under his feet. He was thin and yellow and dull-eyed, a horror to himself, a thing of contempt to his fellow-men.

Private Fordyce sat reading that letter. It was a sad little letter, impulsive, a little brutal, perhaps, because of its naive sincerity.

"Oh, Phil, I've been so worried. I have been thinking and thinking—at night. It's been coming a long time. I don't care for you as I ought to; we ought not to be engaged any more; it's all been a mistake. I feel horrible, with you out there, but I'm telling the truth, Phil, because it's no use pretending."

Private Fordyce sat and stared at the sheet. He was thinking of a little pale-faced girl with elusive dark eyes, a typist who rattled her machine all day, and fled for half an hour into a Lyons's shop to lunch on a glass of milk, stewed fruit, and a slice of cake. Fordyce was no strong man, but she had appealed to the sensitive, protective spirit in him, and part of his cowardice had been a horrible hunger to see her again. He used to think of Kitty at night, with his cheek pressed against a sandbag, death and her pale face before his eyes. She had seemed so pure and clean and impossible, while he lived in the mud of the trenches. He remembered kissing her. And now this letter had come.

A couple of men who were cleaning their rifles near him were watching Fordyce quizzically. The guns had started thudding behind the lines, and shells were rushing overhead. Something was on, and these two youngsters were waiting for Fordyce to develop his characteristic nerviness.

But Fordyce sat and stared at the letter and did not notice the shells. A wounded self-pity held possession of his consciousness. Nobody cared. He had always been in the way. Even his parents had died and left him in the lurch. And now Kitty had thrown him over—the one creature in the world upon whom he had counted with a hungry and pathetic faith.

He folded up the letter and put it in the left breast pocket of his tunic. Her photo was there, and sundry other letters that she had written him.

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"Oh—lord!"

His self-pity was developing into a slow and bitter anger. Life had been cruel to him, nobody had ever troubled; it would have been better if he had never been born. He hated the world, hated England, hated his regiment, hated his comrades. Curse the silly, sordid, horrible war! What did anything matter? He would get himself killed, stand up on the parapet just to show these beasts that he did not care.

A sergeant-major came shouting along the trench.

"Fall in! Fall in! Full kits! Tumble up!"

He sighted Fordyce and gave him a hard stare.

"Now then, you—— Want to be left behind?"

Fordyce was up with a queer mad light in his eyes, fastening buckles with strangely steady fingers.

He heard the men talking excitedly.

"D's going over."

"After that there redoubt?"

"'Tain't D at all. It's us."

"Blimey! We're in for it."

"How's Funky Phil feeling, I wonder?"

Fordyce took no notice, but he had a feeling of fierce, wild soreness inside his head. Something seemed to be boiling, boiling, and waiting to blow up.

The men fell in. Officers were grouped about the colonel and the adjutant. The guns were thudding furiously.

Then the captain of B Company came along with four subs. He stopped and spoke a few words to each platoon.

"We are to rush 'Stinking Billy,' men, and hold on there till the supports come up. I know B will do its duty."

Fordyce fancied that Captain Blount looked at him with peculiar significance. His anger with everything grew to a white heat. He felt that he was going mad.

The men were moving up the communication trench in stolid yet tingling silence. Boxes of bombs were being carried up. In one of the recesses a dozen regimental stretcher-bearers were waiting.

The man next Fordyce nudged him rudely.

"Feeling like 'avin' a ride, Funk?"

Fordyce ground his teeth.

"You go to hell!" he snarled back.

A Company were in the front line, ready to help B buck over the parapet. Observers were peering into periscopes while the shells

streamed overhead, rending the entanglements in front of "Stinking Billy." Captain Blount was shaking hands with the captain of A Company. A second lieutenant was lighting a cigarette and trying to hold the match steady.

Fordyce stared at the sandbags in front of him. He was quite mad in a queer, logical way. He wanted to rush out there and get killed, put an end to everything, forget Kitty. Would those confounded guns never shut up! The German wire and parapet must be so much mush. Why didn't they go over?

Captain Blount was standing, staring at his wrist-watch. Suddenly the guns ceased thudding. There was an eerie, tense silence. Fordyce could hear the man next him swallowing and swallowing. Someone dropped a rifle and was cursed.

Captain Blount's arm went up.

"Bombers!"

Out went a scurry of brown figures, shoved up lustily from behind. There was a spatter of machine-gun and rifle fire, and the "zing" of exploding bombs.

"B Company—charge!"

Private Fordyce was one of the first men out of the trench, and racing across No Man's Land with a mad look in his eyes. His rage had suddenly turned itself upon the Germans. They had made the war, they had made him a soldier, they had lost him Kitty. Stick the swine!

The German wire had been cut to pieces, and Fordyce found himself skimming through it, dodging shell holes, and stumbling over rusty tin cans. He went over the German parapet into the redoubt, and then the fun began.

Fordyce could never describe what happened during the next hour. There were lots of Germans, swarming in grey lumps out of dug-outs and shelters, men with white faces and wild eyes. It was just a sort of mad jumble in which men stabbed and swore, fell down and got up again or lay still, battered each other's faces with trench clubs or the butts of rifles, threw bombs, blew each other to bits. It seemed to go on for an eternity, and Fordyce saw his bayonet all red. He was knocked over twice in the scrimmage and got up gnashing his teeth, a little devil who was out for blood.

Suddenly the redoubt seemed to grow very empty, though littered with brown and grey figures. The Germans had fled up the main communication trench, and B Company con-

"FUNKY PHIL"

sisted of some thirty men. Captain Blount was still standing, though his right hand had been pulped by a bomb.

"Come on, six men with me. The rest of you push right and left and hold on till the supports come up."

Fordyce ran forward and met the captain's eyes. They smiled at him.

"Ah, Fordyce, I've noticed you. Done very well, man. Bring along that box of bombs."

They rushed to barricade the communication trench in preparation for the German counter-attack. Sandbags were tumbled down and piled across the narrow alley, the men working like mad. Captain Blount sat down with his back to the wall, and tried to tie up his hand.

"Let me, sir."

Fordyce knelt, and tore open his own first field-dressing. The other men were about five yards away, lugging up a great timber mantelet that the Germans had held ready but had not been used.

Zing-zing!

Two bombs came down, and the party with the mantelet seemed to disappear.

Captain Blount's eyes were furious. Neither he nor Private Fordyce had been touched.

Fordyce snarled like a wild animal and made a dash for the box of bombs. He lugged it up close to the half-built barricade, and crouched, watching the crowd of Boches who had appeared in the communication trench. A bomb came curving, but it was a bad shot, and exploded harmlessly on the ground above.

Then Fordyce started work. He had passed through a bombing course, and he had been something of a cricketer at home. He began bombing the Germans in the

trench, pitching his bombs like an inspired base-ball crack. He was quite mad for the moment, mad with the blood lust, but his brain and muscles worked with the precision of a machine.

The Germans tried to rush him, but he blew them back. Then they tried lobbing bombs at him from behind a curve of the trench. Fordyce's luck was marvellous, and he was not touched. The Germans came up the trench again, counting on having smashed him, but Fordyce was ready, and the Germans went back once more.

"Fordyce, by George, man, you're just splendid! Where the devil are the supports?"

Captain Blount was sitting with his back



Private Fordyce opened his eyes and sat up as though a bomb had been dropped near him

to the barricade. He had been hit a second time and could not stand.

Then an officer tried to snipe Fordyce with a revolver, and a bullet plugged through his left shoulder.

Fordyce threw a bomb, and the officer disappeared.

But this luck could not last for ever. A bomb landed on the earth bank above, rolled down, and exploded. Fordyce staggered against the barricade, his right leg pulped.

"Lie down, man!"

"Damn them——"

He knelt down and continued to throw

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bombs, growing fainter and fainter, and whiter about the lips. Captain Blount dragged himself to the box, and, squatting there, tried to help.

"Why don't those fools come?"

There was a cheer. The supports came pouring up at last, just as Private Fordyce rolled over on his side.

Captain Blount pointed to him.

"Get that man back. No, curse you, leave me alone. Get Fordyce back. He's worth the V.C., that boy. Where are the stretcher-bearers?"

"Comin', sir."

"Carry him out. And look out, give those dashed Boches gip. Fordyce has fought them for twenty minutes on his own."

They picked Fordyce up and carried him back into the redoubt, where some zealous soul fixed an improvised tourniquet round his right thigh.

Two or three Tommies gathered round.

"Who is it?"

"What—Funky Phil!"

One of the men who had carried Fordyce back replied with a vigorous oath.

"What! Not much—funk about 'im. You should 'ave 'eard what the captin said. Wouldn't be touched till we'd got 'im away."

Private Fordyce lay for a long while in a base hospital somewhere in France. His right foot had to be amputated, but that was not the end of his experiences. The stump would not heal; there was necrosis of the bone. He lay in bed for weeks, and went through two more operations before the thing healed.

He had a letter from Captain Blount; he even had a letter from the colonel. Moreover, the men who were left of B Company sent him a sort of circular testimonial.

"DEAR PHIL" (it began),—"This is to say that B Company's mighty proud of you. You came out fine at the finish, and some of us chaps asks your pardon for playing the fool with you sometimes. We've still got 'Stinking Billy,' but we call it 'Fordyce Corner.' Hope you are doing well, old man, and safe in Blighty."

He had two letters from Aunt Jane in Bloomsbury, Aunt Jane who had given him a home; but somehow Fordyce cared for

none of these things. He was very quiet, very patient, lying in a sort of daze, reading a little, dreaming a great deal. His eyes had a lost look. If only Kitty had written—but there was no Kitty now.

The nurses were inclined to make a pet of him. He was such a little sportsman, and somehow the tale of his doings had got abroad.

One morning an officer with red tabs appeared.

"Is 209567 Private P. Fordyce in this ward?"

The Sister pointed out Phil.

"Good. I have a little piece of news for the boy. We heard he was here."

The officer went and sat down beside Fordyce's bed. He was a grey-headed officer with very wise, kind eyes.

"Well, Fordyce, getting better?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"I have come to tell you that you have won the V.C. We shall have to get you across to Buckingham Palace before long."

Fordyce lay very still and white when the officer had gone. His neighbours shouted congratulations; the Sister and the nurses came and made a fuss of him, but he only smiled a little, and said nothing. There was no one to whom this bit of glory really mattered. Besides, he felt himself to be something of a humbug; he had tried to commit suicide, and they had given him the V.C.

His thoughts wandered on. He supposed that his name would appear in the papers. Kitty might see it. He discovered a kind of melancholy satisfaction in picturing her reading the news. What a mockery the whole thing was! He would have the right to wear that strip of ribbon on his tunic and no one would be interested, save Aunt Jane and the old fellows who were left at the office.

That office! He imagined that he would have to go back to it, and spend the whole day dabbing a pen in an inkpot. He would not have minded so much if he had had Kitty to work for. They were keeping his place open, and his salary had been raised three months before he had joined the Army, but somehow he loathed the idea of that office, drudging away, knowing that Kitty was so near.

June found Private Fordyce shipped across to England, and comfortably bestowed in a hospital for convalescents. This so-called

"FUNKY PHIL"

hospital was nothing less than a great country house standing in the midst of its own woodlands, and within sight of the Channel. Private Fordyce had never before seen such a place. It was all greenness and mystery and blue distances and meadows full of flowers and deep, waving grass. There was a lake with a punt on it, and the men could fish. The gardens seemed one great smother of colour and sweet perfumes. Everything was so spacious and satisfying; they appeared to grow roses by the acre; you could lose yourself in a world of flowers.

Private Fordyce spent the first few days being trundled round in a wheeled chair. It was a pilgrimage into paradise, and his dark eyes were full of a questioning wonder. He had seen Epping, and Yarmouth beach, and Southend-on-Sea, and he had spent a day once on the Surrey hills; but this mystery mansion, with its woods and gardens, meadows and smooth water, was utterly strange and astonishing. What big and beautiful lives these people must lead! The contrast made him sad, and a little bitter.

Within a week he was allowed to get about on crutches, and he set out to explore. He got desperately tired at first, but there always seemed to be a seat or a soft grass bank where the view was particularly magical. Private Fordyce preferred to be alone. His sensitiveness had increased, and the beauty of this sweet place made him dream sad dreams.

Then Aunt Jane came down to see him, her lunch and the daily paper stowed away in a little canvas bag. The paper happened to be full of immense significance, since it advertised her nephew as a new V.C.

She was hot and a little overawed, but very talkative, and she sat beside Phil under the shade of a cedar, with the paper on her lap.

"Bless me, child, think of you being a hero! Why, it isn't so long ago I boxed your ears. What are they going to give you for losing your foot? Mind you stand up to them War Office people, my dear. But there, you'll get along fine with an artificial foot; it won't spoil your chances in the office; you've served your country, and you're a hero. And how many Germans did you kill?—swarms of 'em, I suppose."

She spent quite a gay day with her nephew, spread her gracious admiration over

the gardens, though she seemed hurt that there wasn't a big fountain and a lot of nice statues dotted about. Phil said very little, but his silence did not matter. His aunt did the talking for both of them.

"You'll have to go and see the King, child. Well, I never! And all the girls will be running after you!"

She almost winked at him.

"Don't you be too easy with them, Phil. Remember you're a hero. There's no knowing who you mightn't marry. V.C.'s don't grow on currant bushes."

She was carried away by the mansion's car, that ran to and fro between the great house and the station, a very proud yet affable figure, her hat a little awry, her soul full of a sense of added importance.

Two days later a girl with a pale face and rather frightened eyes called on Aunt Jane.

"If you please, I'm Kitty Manson. I've come to inquire about Philip."

Now, Aunt Jane knew nothing of Philip's romance. Her eyes regarded this young woman with critical curiosity.

"Oh, indeed! I don't know that I have had the pleasure of hearing your name before."

The girl's frightened eyes were appealing.

"Then Phil never told you?"

"Don't tell me he went and got married without my——"

"No, oh, no. Nothing like that. But have you seen him? We were just friends."

Aunt Jane sniffed.

"I understand. Seen him? Of course I have, the little hero. He's staying in a great house in the country, down at Bolsover."

She closed her lips suddenly.

"But he's not fit to see visitors yet. Of course, I'm his aunt; that's different."

"He's going to get well?"

"To be sure."

The girl rose.

"So he never said anything. Thank you so much. I—I just wanted to know how he was."

She fled, and Aunt Jane looked grim.

"The hussies! They're after that boy already. Well, after all, it's only nature."

Three days later a girl in black left the train at Bolsover station. She was a stranger, and looked frightened, and did not seem to know which way to go.

"Please can you tell me where the soldiers' hospital is?"

"You mean the Hall, miss?"

"I suppose so."

"There's a car going up. Hi, Ted, here's a lady going to the Hall."

Kitty Manson fell into a panic when the size and the magnificence of the place dawned on her. Supposing she had made a mistake, or that Phil's aunt had purposely given her the wrong address? Moreover, she was by no means the mistress of her own emotions, and those dark eyes of hers were ready to fill with tears.

The car stopped outside the great stone porch. Kitty had to get out and brave the situation.

A Sister was standing in the doorway. She was a very great lady, though Kitty did not know it; but she liked the Sister's face.

"I've come to see Private Fordyce."

The great lady smiled at her.

"Does he expect you?"

"No."

"It is not a visiting day, but we will pass that over. Are you his sister?"

"No; I'm——"

The great lady tactfully turned back and spoke to a patient who was polishing the parquet floor of the hall.

"Miles, have you seen Fordyce?"

"I helped him out half an hour ago, y'r Grace. He's got a favourite spot of his own, down among them fir trees. I took him down in a long chair."

"Will you show this young lady the way?"

Private Miles was a nice lad. He took charge of Kitty, and with cheerful chivalry guided her through the gardens to Phil's retreat. It was among some fir trees beyond a great bank of rhododendrons, a solitary spot overlooking the lake.

"There you are, straight ahead."

Miles most generously vanished, having no intention of being in the way.

Private Fordyce was lying on the long

chair under the fir trees, his eyes closed as though he were asleep. He did not hear Kitty cross the grass. She stood looking at him, afraid of the crisis she was provoking, and half tempted to run away.

She went nearer under the shade of the trees.

"Phil!"

Private Fordyce opened his eyes and sat up as though a bomb had been dropped near him.

"Kitty!"

But she just stood there and began to weep with innocent and complete simplicity, not trying to stay her tears or even to wipe them away.

"Kitty!"

He twisted round and sat sideways on the long chair, looking up at her with hungry eyes. But she did nothing but stand there and cry softly, her face half averted.

Private Fordyce began to suffer from a sense of thickness in the throat. His upper lip quivered.

"Kitty, don't cry."

His own voice was very tremulous.

"Oh, I've been such a brute to you."

"No, you haven't."

"I found I was all wrong. I—I—did care."

"Come here, Kitty. I—I——"

Private Fordyce was blubbering wholeheartedly. She made a movement towards him, and he reached out and caught her wrist.

"S-s-sit down, dear."

She sat down, and her head rested against his shoulder.

"D-d-don't cry, dear. I'm—I'm s-so happy. I j-just wanted you—and nothing else."

"Oh, Phil! And I'm—I'm s-so happy too."

Though no one would have believed it, seeing them sitting there hand in hand and weeping like two children.

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The Living Death

—And the mystic "something" which brought back the tide of life to the empty shell of a man

By Warwick Deeping

JAMES GIFFARD sat all day in the chair by the window, his hands resting on his knees, his blue eyes staring straight ahead of him, like the eyes of a figure carved out of stone.

It was a case of shell-shock. A 5.9 shell had burst right on one of the guns, killed the whole gun team, and left Captain Giffard standing untouched.

A brother officer had come running up to him.

"Good heavens, Jim, that was a narrow thing!"

Giffard had just stared at him with puzzled, horrified eyes, put his hands to his head, and crumpled down into the mud.

It was a queer case. Giffard had been in this military hospital for mental and nerve diseases for two months, and had never spoken a word. His soul seemed to have abandoned him or to be in a trance; his human intelligence had vanished, and had left a void behind it. But for a slight tremor of the hands he appeared to be in perfect physical condition. He ate well, slept perfectly, but in all else he was worse than an idiot child. He did not utter a sound of any kind, did not hear, did not appear to see anything with his eyes. He was just an automaton, a pathetic body that had lost its soul, a man who was dead and yet alive.

Now Major Murdoch, the young doctor in charge, was not only a very brilliant "nerve" expert, but he had a soul, and this dead-live man worried him. He knew of someone who waited, someone who wrote letters, who was being deceived for her own good and for the good of the unborn life she carried.

He had put his best male nurse in charge of Giffard, a man with soft hands and an educated brain. This orderly had been a well known artist before the war; he was now Private Temperley, in the R.A.M.C.

"This thing's too tragic, Temperley. I have to keep writing lying letters and trusting to time."

"It's almost worse than death, sir."

"I shall try suggestion again. One must do something."

"I wonder if he sees, sir?"

The doctor threw out his arm as though he meant to strike Giffard in the face, but the man never flinched, nor did his eyelids flicker.

"Extraordinary. I could find nothing wrong with his eyes. No, it's mental; the higher centres are asleep."

"Supposing one let off a gun near him?"

"I should not quite like to try that experiment—not yet, at any rate."

Not fifty miles away from the hospital, Constance Giffard lay in a long chair under a weeping ash in the garden, dreaming over a book that was as quiet and as placid as her garden. The Giffards' home was at the head of a wooded valley, and in the distance you could see the sea. It was a place of repose, sweetness, tranquillity. Someone came from the house.

"The post?"

"Yes."

"Anything interesting?"

"Perhaps."

Constance Giffard's sister handed her the letters. Grace was older than James Giffard's wife and rather more of a woman of the world.

"Here's one from the doctor."

"Oh——?"

"I wonder how Jim is?"

She opened the letter and read it, while a faint shadow seemed to pass across her sister's face. Grace was in the conspiracy; she knew the truth about James Giffard; she had to pretend, for Constance's sake, that it was they who were keeping silent on account of Jim.

"He doesn't say when I may be allowed to see him."

"What does he say?"

"I still wish you to let me keep your husband at absolute rest. I don't want him excited in any way. I have seen a great number of these cases, and I want you to trust me, and not to be impatient. He must just vegetate. I don't let him read or listen to music."

She glanced at the letter sadly.

"How dull! And he doesn't know about me?"

"Major Murdoch did not want him to know."

"Quite right. He mustn't be worried."

"When it is all over——"

"Oh, my dear, it is too good to think of! To have him back again! How lucky I am, when so many men never come back."

Her sister's lip trembled slightly.

"Yes. This ghastly war."

"I suppose the doctor is telling us the truth?"

"Of course, dear, what makes you think that?"

"Oh, I don't know. But you saw him yourself. Sometimes I have a horrid feeling that he is not really alive, that they are pretending——"

Grace had to steady her voice.

"Well, I was allowed to see him through the doorway. He didn't know I was there. He looked fat and rosy."

"How good! Oh, I wish this was all over——"

"Don't worry, Connie. You know I hope it will be a boy."

They had tried the Faradaic current on James Giffard, but without the slightest mental response. They had tried flashes of light in the dark, the sound of a gramophone, even some soft notes on a bugle. Nothing roused him, nothing seemed to touch his sleeping intelligence.

"Confound it, the man's frontal cells can't have been jarred into nothingness. Let me try hypnotism again."

Murdoch employed hypnotic suggestion for fully half an hour, but Giffard sat in his chair like an image.

"Captain Giffard, you will stand up."

Giffard remained seated.

"A kind of chronic catalepsy. I wonder if we trephined and just tickled up those frontal lobes. Yet—I don't know. Watch him awhile, Temperley."

"Yes, sir,"

"You are absolutely certain he never notices things?"

"Absolutely certain, sir. He wouldn't pose to me for hours, and never move."

Temperley often tried quaint persuasions of his own. He would step up to Giffard and speak in his ear.

"Wife. At home. Your wife. You will see your wife."

Or—

"You are married. What about children? Your wife wants you. Going home? It's summer. Can you smell the roses?"

Giffard never made any response. It was like whispering in the ear of a man who was asleep, a man who would never wake.

Another month passed, and James Giffard was the father of a son.

The young intelligence was ready to unfold itself like a flower, watched by a mother's eyes, eyes whose brown depths were full of a new tenderness. Constance Giffard lay near the open window, where she could see the woods and the sea; the roses nodded at her, and the honeysuckle poured its scent into the room. She was a mother, and the health and sweetness of her body lived in the youngster at her side.

Grace Murchison felt guiltily conscious of her secret when she met Constance's happy eyes.

"They will let me see Jim soon? He can know now. There will be nothing to worry him."

"You mustn't get excited, dear."

"I am not excited, Gracie; only very happy and thankful. I've got both Jim and the boy."

Major Murdoch sat in his room, smoking a pipe and reading the day's letters. There was only one letter that interested him, and that was Grace Murchison's. She wrote quite frankly:

"Can you hold out any hope to us? It is impossible for this make-believe to be carried any farther. You see, I can invent no more excuses. My sister is counting the days now. She will be up and about before very long. The child is lovely. It does seem so hard and brutal, just when she is so happy. I cannot see any way out of it; she will have to be told the truth."

Murdoch knocked his pipe out, and went to a little private ward where Giffard lived and slept. The doctor met Temperley in the corridor, and handed him Grace Murchison's letter. They were friends, these two, for such friendships are possible in our new and amazing army.

"There's a problem for us, Temperley."

The artist stood by a window, reading, conscious of the green world without and the sunshine, the blue sky and the flowers.

"It's a tragedy."

"You have noticed no change?"

"None."

THE LIVING DEATH



She kept her long vigil, trying to will herself into his sleep

The two men looked at each other.

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"I don't like experimenting. And yet a shock of some sort might set his brain going."

Temperley's mild, dreamy eyes stared into the distance.

"I wonder. I'm not much of a psychologist. I think I have lost faith in the shock idea, the shaking a clock to make it start. Life's so queer; and there is so much instinct in it."

"What are you driving at?"

"I'm a mystic. I believe in all sorts of strange forces. I believe that Christ performed many of the miracles that are ascribed to Him. I have a feeling that someone—the one particular magical person could wake that man's soul."

"By a sort of spirit touch?"

"Don't smile. I'm a vitalist."

"I'm not smiling, man. I feel particularly humble. After all it seems a crude sort of thing to open a man's skull and tickle up his brain. Have you anything in the way of a suggestion?"

Temperley was fingering the letter.

"I should tell his wife the truth."

"You would?"

"Yes. Again I am a mystic. I believe there is some subtle communion between two people who have grown into each other's lives."

"You look on marriage as a sacrament?"

"Some marriages. I know I am an idealist. Of course, this would depend on the kind of woman——"

"And the kind of man?"

"Of course."

They went into the room and looked at Giffard. He was the same pathetic, blue-eyed, cataleptic creature, staring straight before him without a flicker of intelligence on his face.

"What was he before this happened—the common, natural, practical man?"

"No, I don't think so. There was some sort of soul there."

Murdoch pondered a moment.

"I think we have got to face it, Temperley. His wife will have to be told."

"She must know some time. And life may prove subtler than science."

It fell to Grace Murchison to break the news to her sister. Sentimentalists are always in danger of magnifying the pain and the anguish that we mortals suffer, and in some ways this war has freed us from our romantic hypocrisies. The rampant and healthy egotism of life survives, despite these so-called tragedies. Buds do not cease to open on a rose bush because a full-blown bloom has been torn away.

Grace Murchison was a sentimentalist as well as a woman of the world, and she experienced one of the great astonishments of her life when she set out to tell the truth to James Giffard's wife. She spent a restless night over Murdoch's letter, and had worried herself for hours, wondering how the thing could be done most gently.

She chose to wait till Constance Giffard had her baby in her arms, and standing by the window with her back to the bed, she felt her way towards an avowal.

"I heard from Dr. Murdoch again this morning."

"Did you?"

"I think he must be an extraordinarily nice man. He writes so understandingly."

Constance was holding her boy with white and untrembling hands. There was a queer, expectant look in her eyes, but no fear.

"I am quite strong now, Grace."

Miss Murchison half turned her head with a little start of surprise.

"Of course you are strong, dear. I was going to say—"

"They are not pleased with Jim, Grace."

"My dear!"

"Isn't that the truth?"

Grace Murchison caught her breath.

"Yes. But how—"

The wife's eyes shone with a strange, wise light.

"Oh, I felt it long ago. Women fear things, and do not expect too much. Life was being too kind to me. And I knew that you were keeping something back; I was sure of it; you were thinking of me and this little live thing here. I'm quite brave, Grace."

Her sister stood speechless for a moment.

"I was so afraid—"

"I know. Now—tell me—"

"Jim—Jim is not himself. You see—"

"Be quick."

"He seems to have lost something. He never speaks, never takes any notice of anybody, does not seem to see or hear. It is a strange case, so the doctor says, just as though Jim were sleeping with his eyes wide open."

"It was the shock?"

"So they think. And yet—there is nothing wrong with his body. Oh, my dear, I'm so—"

Constance Giffard's calm voice reproved and repelled her sister's emotionalism.

"I don't feel like crying, Grace. No, I don't want to cry, dear, and I won't. Please—for my sake."

She showed herself the stronger of the two, refusing to let herself be shaken or to be rendered useless by grief. She held up her child and kissed it; her eyes were steady and her lips did not tremble.

"So the doctors have failed, Grace?"

Her sister was faltering between astonishment and tears.

"I suppose so. They have tried to rouse Jim. He's like a man whose soul is asleep."

"There was no wound?"

"None."

A look of fanatical and passionate self-confidence flashed like a white light on Constance's face.

"They are strangers. Jim never reacted to strangers; he was always on the defensive with them."

"But, my dear—"

"Oh—I know; I'm just a superstitious fool, but I have faith, and I—I love him very dearly."

Grace had turned, and was looking at her sister's calm face.

"I don't think you realise, dear."

"Yes, Grace, I do. You think that because science has failed that it is useless for me to go on hoping."

"I don't want you to suffer."

"Women were born to suffer—that their happiness might be the greater."

THE LIVING DEATH

"What am I to do?"

"Bring me a writing-pad, and take baby. I want to write to the doctor."

Private Temperley was amusing himself by making pen-and-ink sketches of some of the patients in the garden when an orderly came out and hailed him.

"The Major wants you."

"Where?"

"In his room."

Major Murdoch was seated at his desk when Private Temperley entered the room, saluted, and stood to attention.

"I wanted to show you something, Temperley."

"Yes, sir."

"I have had this letter from Mrs. Giffard. It bears out in a remarkable way what your mysticism suggested. Read it."

Temperley turned to the light, and read what Constance Giffard had written:

"DEAR MAJOR MURDOCH,—

"My sister has told me the truth about my husband's condition. In a way I was not unprepared for this news, for I had a feeling that something was being kept from me.

"My husband's higher self seems to be asleep, and you have been unable to rouse him.

"Now, I have a firm belief that I can wake him, bring him back to a consciousness of life, and I want you to let me try.

"But certain conditions must be fulfilled. He must be brought home, and I want him to travel so that he arrives here at night. I shall want him to have his eyes bandaged, and no one must speak to him. He must be left alone with me.

"All this may seem very absurd to you, and that I shall only win for myself a grievous disappointment. But I have a feeling that I can succeed—where your skill has failed. This is not the arrogance of ignorance, but the faith of a woman who loves.

"Believe me,

"Truly yours,

"CONSTANCE GIFFARD."

Temperley turned and laid the letter on the Major's desk with an air of quiet reverence.

"May her faith be justified," he said; "courage is the greatest of the virtues in these days of ours."

"I shall send you in charge of Giffard, Temperley."

"Thank you, sir. I hope I shall bring back good news."

It was a still night early in July when a big closed car left the hospital gates and made for the open country. In it were James Giffard and Temperley, while a second orderly sat on the seat beside the driver. James Giffard had a white bandage over his eyes, and in his ears were pledgets of wool. He sat stiff and motionless in his corner of the car, like a man gagged and bound, and Temperley sat silent beside him.

The night was ablaze with stars. The scent of new-mown hay drifted into the car and smote Temperley with many sweet and poignant memories. The faint lights of the car showed him little of the world without, the glimmer of a whitewashed cottage, the shadowy outline of some great tree. The mystery of the man beside him dominated his thoughts. Would love find the key for the unlocking of Giffard's soul?

It was past ten when the car glided slowly down a woodland road, turned in between two brick gate-posts and past the darkened windows of a lodge. Temperley had a glimpse of dim parkland asleep under the sky, of high woods reaching towards the stars. The dark world seemed full of the scent of newly cut hay, a perfume subtle enough to awaken the dead.

The car drew up in front of a silent, lightless house. Temperley opened the door and climbed out. Someone was waiting there, a shadowy figure in a cloak.

The figure drew back towards the house, and Temperley felt bidden to follow.

"Are you—with Captain Giffard?"

She spoke in a whisper.

Temperley saluted.

"Yes."

"I am his wife."

"I have been his nurse for two months. My name is Temperley. Before the war I painted pictures."

"How strange! Of course I know your work. And perhaps you understand things better than most men. I wish my husband to be taken to his old room; everything is just as it was. The house is in darkness; I don't want a word spoken."

"I understand. And we shall put him to bed."

"Yes; and leave him with me."

So James Giffard came to his own house and walked blindfold through it, a mere automaton, moving with slow tread between the men who guided him. They had to make a hand-seat and carry him up the stairs, while the rays from an electric torch lit them from behind.

"The first door on the right. You will find a candle there, and everything put out ready."

An hour later James Giffard lay in his own bed in that dark room, while his wife sat near him, listening to his steady breathing. The house was utterly still, both within and without, for there was no wind blowing up the valley, and the trees were masses of motionless foliage. It was as though the house itself knew that a crisis in the history of its inmates was at hand, and waited, hushed in suspense.

Constance Giffard sat in a low chair beside the bed, leaning forward so that her arms rested on it, and her hands lay over her husband's heart. The bandage had been removed from his eyes, and the pledgets of wool from his ears. He was asleep, though sleeping and waking had lost their sharp contrasts, seeing that his waking state was akin to sleep.

But a vital fire burnt near him in the darkness, a miraculous and invisible flame—the love in his wife's heart. Tense, motionless, bending towards him, her hands touching his body, she kept her long vigil, trying to will herself into his sleep. It was as though the miraculous life force in her was striving to flow into his body. She did not pray or appeal to any unseen power, but all the night she was pouring out a flood of yearning and tenderness towards him. The glow of her love waited for the kindling of some answering spark in the body on the bed.

Once she felt a sudden strange quickening of his heart under her hands. Her own heart answered, thrilling with mysterious expectancy. She had a strange feeling of movement in the room, of a presence near her in the darkness. All through those hours James Giffard had remained absolutely still, save for the rising and falling of his chest as he breathed, but just before the dawn came he moved his right hand very slowly. It crept slowly and uncertainly over the quilt, fumbled and hesitated a moment, and then came to rest on the hands of his wife.

A sudden rush of hope and exultation swept over Constance Giffard. The seemingly dead man moved; his soul seemed to be stirring faintly, and answering her will.

Then the dawn came slowly, stealthy and grey, with the tremulous piping of awakened birds. The darkness melted out of the room; familiar things grew visible, took on shape and colour. There were the pictures that had hung there for years on the walls, the great mahogany wardrobe by the door, the glass-faced corner cupboard, the Sheraton pier-glass, the sofa with its blue-and-white cover under the window. An open cupboard showed Constance's dresses hanging, streaks of white and rose and green. Her dressing table glimmered with glass and silver. The same tapestry curtains hung from the poles.

The blinds were up, and as the light increased, Constance watched her husband's face. Her eyes were full of an indescribable tenderness and yearning. Her soul called to his soul and willed it to answer.

Giffard's face had changed in the night. It was the face of a healthy man sleeping a deep, natural sleep, firm and virile, even in repose. It was the man, the husband whom Constance had known of old, not the poor, flaccid, soulless thing—a body without a mind.

She closed her eyes for a moment, her face strained, intensely appealing.

"God grant that he hears me."

And suddenly she called him by name, her hands holding his.

"Jim—Jim."

His eyes opened as though she had roused him from sleep. They were the eyes of a sane man, a man gloriously and happily astonished.

"Connie! Dear heart—why——?"

She bent over him.

"You are just here—in the old room. And I'm here with you. Yes, it's all real."

He drew her hands to his face.

"Why, I was over there—in France. I remember. We were just going up with the battery. What does it all mean?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh—my dear; that's all in the past; forget it. Only the now matters. Don't puzzle your head, Jim; life's very strange and wonderful——"

He drew her down and kissed her.

"I don't understand—at all," he said; "but what does it matter? I'm kissing you——"



Amst. Dec. 1917

TWICE BROKEN

By WARWICK DEEPING



THE white face of Jack Summerhays floated for a few seconds on the surface of the glass-blue calm of the sea. The side of the ship towered up over him like a white wall. For an hour he had been fighting for life, trying to keep afloat, with his left arm broken; he had gone under twice before he had drifted close to the motionless ship.

"Be quick; oh—be quick!"

Summerhays' dying eyes seemed to see something as he floated there with his head thrown back and all his throat showing. He smiled. The white side of the hospital ship seemed to him to be a wall of light, with a celestial figure at its summit, a figure of a girl bending down towards him, with her hands outstretched. He saw her in a kind of blue glittering haze with her snowy head-dress and her pitying dark eyes, a dream face, a vision seen by a drowning man.

"Here; oh—be quick!"

She was beckoning and pointing, and there was a splashing of oars and a grinding of rowlocks. Jack Summerhays was beginning to sink like a man slipping into oblivion, his white face melting into the clear blue of the water. A few silver bubbles came from his mouth and burst on the surface. Then a man standing in the bows of the boat shouted an order, made a thrust with his boat-hook, and caught the slack of Jack Summerhays' khaki shirt.

"Right 'o. Got him. Catch hold—some of you."

And Jack Summerhays was dragged over the gunwale.

The hospital ship *Mimosa* had picked up some fifty survivors from the torpedoed liner on which Private John Summerhays, of the 23rd Australian Horse, had been sailing to England on six weeks' leave. The *Mimosa's* screws were at work again, and her boats hoisted to the davits, while an R.A.M.C. orderly knelt astride John Summerhays' body on an upper deck,

pumping air into him by Schäfer's method of artificial respiration. Two other orderlies were fixing temporary splints to the Australian's broken arm. Everybody was busy on the *Mimosa* as she turned her nose southwards and resumed her passage to Alexandria.

In a quarter of an hour John Summerhays was experiencing the anguish of a return to life and consciousness. His ribs felt sore, his arm hurt like hell, and the sea water had made him monstrous sick.

"Cheer up, old sonny," said the orderly who had been pumping at him, "it's real healthy for you to be sick just now——"

"Damn you—let me alone—you ass!" gulped the quaking Australian.

They put him to bed in one of the wards, where the M.O. came and looked at him wisely and said little.

"Hot soup—and sleep, Sister. We'll fix that arm to-morrow."

So John Summerhays slept, and while he slept Sister Ruth Cornish, who had appeared to him while he was drowning as a vision out of heaven, came along from her own ward to Sister Vincent's ward to inquire after the man whom she had seen fished up with a boat-hook.

"I hear you have him. May I look?"

Sister Vincent was a woman who had to be propitiated. She had dignity and was a disciplinarian, and the men referred to her disappointedly as "No Luck!"

"He's asleep."

"There was something familiar about his face when I saw him in the water."

Sister Vincent remarked, "Indeed," and led the way to Summerhays' cot.

"He's an Australian," she said; "I don't like Australians. They're so wild."

Sister Ruth stood looking down at the sleeping man, and in an instant she knew him, though she had not seen him for years. Her thoughts went

back to an English village, and to the Rev. Theophilus Summerhays' scatter-brain, irrepressible son who had been shipped out to Australia after sundry furious irregularities that had made life impossible for him at home. She had not known him well, having been no more than a flapper of sixteen at the time of his exodus. And now she saw him as a lean, long-jawed, firm-lipped man, with sunken eyes, close-cropped hair, and an old bullet weal over the left temple.

"I am sure it is the same. Has he a disc?"

John Summerhays' shirt was open, and the cord of his disc showed. Sister Ruth bent over him, drew the disc gently out, and read on it, "No. — Summerhays J."

She put it back.

"How strange!"

"You know him?"

"I did—very slightly. We came from the same English village."

"Indeed!" said Sister Vincent; "how singular. The world is very small, isn't it?"

Sister Ruth passed the platitude and went softly out of the ward.

In due season John Summerhays awoke, very much refreshed and also healthily hungry. And he carried back to life with him a vivid and provoking memory of a certain exquisite and melting creature bending towards him compassionately as he lay drowning in the sea.

An orderly came along, the orderly who had pumped the Australian clear of water, and Summerhays hailed him

"I say."

"Well, old boy."

"I want to ask you something. I don't know whether I dreamt it or not—but just when I was going under again—and before they lugged me out—I thought I saw a girl up above—"

"So you did," said the orderly, "and I reckon she saved your life."

"How?"

"Why, saw you floating, of course, and shouted to one of the boats. It was Sister Ruth—Sister Cornish."

"Is this her ward?"

The orderly jerked a thumb and indicated Sister Vincent, who had drifted in.

"That's our Angel," he said softly.

"No luck," quoth the Australian, and then wondered why the orderly guffawed.

Summerhays became the victim of a vivid curiosity, and the vision of Sister Ruth haunted him like soft music. He was still meditating upon the affair when the Medical Officer appeared with Sister Vincent and two orderlies pushing a trolley laden with surgical impedimenta, and the M.O. proceeded to deal with Summerhays' arm.

"How did you do it?"

"I don't quite know, sir. Some bally thing fell on me when the torpedo blew us up."

The M.O. made a very neat job of setting and splinting that fracture, but he was an unsentimental beast.

"Suppose I can get up, sir?"

"Not on any account."

"But I'm on leave——"

"I'm afraid that does not make any difference to the treatment."

"But I'll see that it does not do me any harm."

Sister Vincent snubbed him.

"It is time you learnt to obey an order. Soldiers are not allowed to argue."

Summerhays felt greatly disgusted, as he had made up his mind to search out the Vision and thank her. But if he could not go in quest of the Vision, it was possible that she might deign to come to him. So he hailed his old friend the orderly, and put in a demand for note-paper.

"Will a field post card do?"

"No, it won't. I want to write a letter."

The orderly provided the materials, and Summerhays set to work.

"DEAR SISTER," he wrote. "I hear I owe my life to you, and I should very much like to thank you in person. They won't let me up, but if you could spare the time to come and see me, I shall feel the proudest man on earth.—Sincerely yours,

"JOHN SUMMERHAYS."

He addressed the envelope, and made further demands upon the orderly.

"Here, old sport, take this along for me."

"Yes; it will have to be censored."

"What! If it is only going to the other end of the ship! Look at the name."

The orderly looked at it.

"Sister Cornish. What are you writing to her for?"

"Because she saved my life, you juggins. Run along with it, and I'll kiss you good-night."

"Is there anything else you blooming well want while I'm at it?"

"Just a little lock of your hair, dearest."

"Ask the Sister for a bit of hers. So long, old boy."

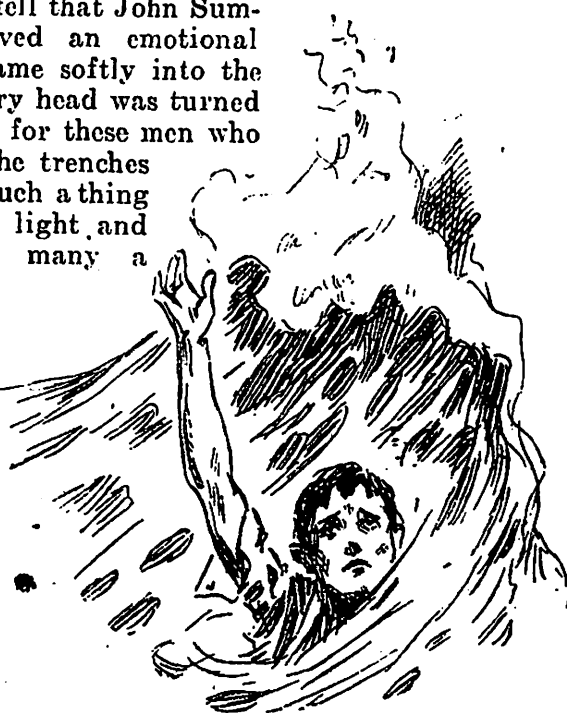
Sister Ruth received that letter, read it, and smiled. John Summerhays' vision of her had not been wholly an extravagance. She was a slightly built girl, with soft dark hair waved over her forehead, clear brown eyes, and a fine white skin. She looked fragile, and wasn't the type of woman who appeals strongly to a man's protective instinct, and yet compels him to admire her pretty shrewdness and her courage.

And so it befell that John Summerhays received an emotional shock. She came softly into the ward, and every head was turned to look at her, for these men who had been in the trenches had not seen such a thing of colour and light, and sweetness for many a long day.

And John Summerhays found her sitting by his cot, very calm and pretty, looking at him with those clear brown eyes of hers as though she were a nurse and nothing more.

"I wanted to thank you,

"For an hour he had been fighting for life, trying to keep afloat."



Sister. If you had not spotted me in the water—I shouldn't be here."

"I could not have done less, could I?"

"Well—no."

He had raised himself, and was looking at her with sudden, puzzled intentness.

"I say—I seem to have seen you before somewhere."

"Perhaps you have."

"But where?"

"My name is Cornish. Do you remember Frinton—in England?"

"Good God!"

He sat up.

"You aren't little Ruth Cornish? Why—of course you are. And I'm bad boy Summerhays. And a graceless young beast I was."

"I believe you were," she admitted.

He felt challenged.

"Well, anyhow, I've made good out there, left as junior partner when I joined up with the boys. Sheep, yes, sheep. Good for two thousand a year."

He wanted to impress her, win her good will; wanted it with sudden fierceness, for never had any feminine thing put him in such a swift fever.

And she sat there, serene and comely, with fascinating little glints of light in the brown pupils of her eyes, and her soft red mouth looking as though no man had ever kissed it. She let him talk, but it made him feel that she was humouring him as a nurse humours a child. Her impersonal and soft kindness exasperated him, for he guessed

that she would be just as kind to any other man in the ward.

"I was going home, you know—when this happened. Of course—the old people are dead, but I had a sort of hunger for the old place. I wanted to see it."

"It was bad luck."

"Was it? I don't know. Perhaps not."

And then she rose, quite abruptly, and smiling, said:

"I must go and look after my patients."

Summerhays watched her pass out of the ward, and he fell into a quite ridiculous and senseless rage.

"Damn—her patients! Why didn't I get into her ward? Of course, they play up—just to get her to make a fuss of them! Sickening! The blighters!"

Which showed that he had quite lost himself with furious and sudden vehemence, also that the Vision had materialised, that he was in love.

Next day the *Mimosa* steamed into the harbour of Alexandria, and the Army Machine took charge of Private Summerhays. He had not seen Sister Ruth again, and he wanted to see her more than he wanted anything else in the world.

And, being desperate, he asked the Medical Officer to do absurd and impossible things.

"Can't I stay on board, sir?"

"Stay on board? Of course not."

"But I'm on leave, and the sea air would do me good."

"It's absolutely out of the question."

"What are you doing with me, sir?"

"We are sending you to the Australian hospital at Mustafa."

"What! six miles out of Alex?"

"Yes."

"And when do I go?"

"At once."

The Machine was inexorable, and the M.O. put a cog in the wheel, and Summerhays was bundled ashore, as disgusted a man as could have been found in Egypt. He had a momentary glimpse of Sister Ruth on the saloon deck, looking quite adorable in her snow white cap and blue uniform, but her eyes did not see him. They put him in an ambulance, and within an hour he was in hospital, with the blue sea and the yellow sand glaring through the

windows, and a few sad looking palms pretending to be green.

Then John Summerhays threatened revolt, and a sympathetic staff agreed with him.

"Damn their red tape! I'm on leave—and I want to see a girl, and they lock me up here. Oh—hell!"

He called for note-paper and wrote a letter, and then another letter to his Colonel, who happened to be a friend.

"Come and get me out of this red and gory cage, Jim. Come and raise hell. I'm in love, man, and I want a glimpse of the girl."

Colonel Jim came from out the sands somewhere down the Canal. He saw, he talked, he ran around and interviewed important people, he refused to bow down to the Machine, and he conquered.

"It's all right, Jack; it's squared. You are to be fixed up and X-rayed, and when the doc. has satisfied himself they'll let you off the chain. You will have to report here once every three days, to see the thing is getting on all right. Want any money?"

"Just that, old man. I came back with nothing but my shirt and breeches and an identity disc."

"How much?"

"Say a square fifty—till I have wired my people."

"I'll write a cheque."

"You're a sport—if ever there was one. Fetch the doc. and let's get the business fixed up."

So the Machine was baulked for a moment, and Private Summerhays sallied out with a cheque, a new pair of breeches, slouch hat, and other accessories, picked up a tram, and invaded Alexandria. There he chartered a carriage and drove straight to the harbour, and to the quay where the *Mimosa* had been lying. She was still there, and Summerhays felt exultant.

He dismissed the Egyptian and his cab, ascended a gangway, and was stopped at the top thereof by an R.A.M.C. corporal. Summerhays was very polite to him, and that arm in a khaki sling carried some persuasion.

"Just come to pay a polite call on an old friend of mine. No harm—I suppose."

"What name?"

"Sister Cornish."

The corporal looked him straight in the eyes.

"Sister Cornish isn't here. She has left for Cairo."

"Damn! You're not kidding?"

"Honour bright. She has gone to take up nursing there in one of the hospitals."

"Which?"

"Can't tell."

Private Summerhays spoke to him very persuasively.

"Look here, be a sport—and go and try and find out."

"I'll get snubbed."

"Well, is it worth five dollars?"

The corporal decided that it was.

But he got his snubbing and obtained no news.

"Seems that they don't know, or won't say. Sister Cornish has gone to report at the Nursing Depôt, or whatever they call it—at Cairo."

"You are not fibbing me, dear son?"

"I saw her go—yesterday."

"Well, it's me for Cairo. Why the hell didn't I keep that horse-shay waiting?"

Private Summerhays took the next train for Cairo and, arriving in that fascinating city late in the evening, took a room in one of the smaller hotels not very far from the Ezbekiya Gardens. A man in love who has no audacity and no enterprise is not worth a wife or gets the sort of wife that he deserves, and John Summerhays was in love with an exceptional woman. He wasted no time in that hotel, but worried the Greek porter, and the French clerk at the bureau, until he had been provided with the information he desired. They found it for him somehow, being a little shy of Australians.

He went out next morning, and walked boldly into the presence of a very great lady who was sitting at a desk in a cool and pleasant office. The great lady betrayed her surprise, for Summerhays had walked through two rooms full of lesser ladies, ladies who had not seemed anxious to give any attention to his affairs.

"You will excuse me, madam, but, as you see, I am a wounded Australian, and I have a cousin nursing in Cairo. It's natural I should want to see her."



"Just come to pay a polite call on an old friend of mine. No harm—I suppose?"

He was very polite, and he looked a clean, and pleasant, and blue-eyed boy.

"Of course."

"I'm in rather a hurry, madam. Our chances are limited in the army."

"What is your cousin's name?"

"Miss Cornish; Miss Ruth Cornish."

The great lady rang for one of the lesser ladies.

"A Nurse Cornish arrived here two days ago, did she not?"

"Yes."

"Where was she sent?"

The lesser lady retired to look up the point, while Summerhays talked very charmingly and with great respect to madam.

"Nurse Cornish went to the Osiris Palace Hospital."

"Thank you so much. Is it far?"



"Sister Korn bent over him, and drew the disc gently out."

"Out beyond the river towards Gezireh."

Summerhays clicked his heels, saluted, and went upon his way. He chartered a Gippi and his carriage just by the Continental Hotel, and told the man to drive him to the Osiris Palace Hospital. And so the lover went clattering through the pleasant streets of new Cairo, past the French-looking houses and the shops, with the many-coloured crowds moving on the foot-paths under a cloudless sky. There were swarthy gentlemen in red fezzes, and barrow-loads of women in black whose eyes looked out over the tops of their yashmaks, Arab urchins chewing sugar-cane, strings of camels, clanging trams, motor-cars, English transport wagons rumbling along. And John Summerhays felt that life was worth living, even though a man had a broken arm.

The Osiris Palace Hospital stood in the midst of what we English call "grounds." It had been an hotel, and it was the most pleasant place imaginable, a great white building with deep loggias and shaded balconies, its walls ablaze with fire-thorn and bougainvillæa. It had goodly green lawns about it, and numberless fine trees, acacias, palms and eucalyptus, and their shadowy masses stood out against the white building and the blue sky.

Summerhays' Gippi driver turned in at the gates with complete assurance, trundled up the carriage drive, and drew up at the foot of a flight of

sumptuous steps. Summerhays signed to him to wait, and went up the steps into a cool vestibule where a nurse in uniform met him. He saluted her.

"Excuse me—I think Sister Cornish is here?"

"Yes."

"I have come to see her. My name is Summerhays. I shall be awfully grateful if you could let her know."

The girl smiled at him.

"I think that can be managed."

Summerhays went back and paid his driver and dismissed him, and, returning to the vestibule, sat down to wait. He waited ten minutes. Instead of the nurse—an orderly appeared.

"Private Summerhays?"

"I'm that."

"Sister Cornish is busy. She can't see anyone."

"She sent the message?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. I'm in no hurry. Will you tell her I'll wait. I suppose there's no objection to my sitting down there under one of those trees?"

The orderly informed him that he—Private Summerhays—could sit there all day so far as he was concerned. So Summerhays went and sat. An hour, two hours, three hours passed; he had brought sandwiches with him, and he ate them, and stuck to his post. Convalescents appeared in the loggia and lay down in long cane chairs. One or two strolled down the steps across to where John Summerhays kept watch.

"Waiting to see somebody?"

"A friend of mine. I'm in no hurry."

He was not communicative and not inclined to be friendly, regarding every man in the hospital as a sentimental idiot that might be trying to work upon Sister Cornish's sweet sympathy. Moreover, he was feeling more and more challenged by her obvious disinclination to meet him.

About three o'clock he saw her appear on the white steps, dressed to go out, and alone. Summerhays knew that she had seen him, but she came down the steps and along the drive as though no interested observer occupied that seat under the acacia.

Summerhays stood up and saluted. She turned and looked at him with simulated surprise.

"Still here?"

"I have been waiting for orders." Her brown eyes held his.

"You had no right to write to me—and you had no right to follow me here."

"But—Sister—I'm not a cad; and it's not my fault, is it—if I—rather like you?"

"I am sure it is not my fault."

"Of course not. Only you can't help—"

She frowned slightly.

"I can't have this sort of thing happening. I am going to Cairo to do some shopping, and you will stay here—till I have gone. If you come here again I shall not see you."

He looked at her blankly.

"It seems rather hard. I made good out there—and I'm not a cad."

"I am not arguing the point with you. Good-bye."

She left Summerhays standing there, very much more desperately in love with her in spite of his exasperation, nor did he attempt to follow her. For Ruth Cornish had a compact and pretty pride of her own, and she was no believer in easy favours. She had made her own way in life, and had had to trust to her own courage for her living and her independence, being a woman whose comeliness had made men pester her not a little. She had her own opinions of men, and her own opinions of marriage. It was only some exceptional man who would win her.

And Summerhays was tantalised and impressed by her aloofness. He knew that she wore no rings, and that ostensibly she was not promised to any man. Nor did she strike him as being cold. Those eyes and that mouth did not belong to a cold woman.

"Confound it—but she has got some strength in that little body of hers! A rough path for you, my son."

He found a vagrant carriage, and was driven back to Cairo meditating.

"I don't care. It's rather fine—that pride of hers! Should I have been pleased if she had simpered, and let me walk straight in? Hang it, she's got grit; she's worth winning."

He sat down at the hotel and wrote her a letter, a letter in which he apologised for having annoyed her, but he confessed that the annoyance would be repeated. He said that he simply could not help it. She would have to try to forgive him, or tell him that he was a helpless fool.

Summerhays received no reply to that letter. He made another attack upon the Osiris Palace and was repulsed without gaining a glimpse of Sister Ruth. He tried sitting on the seat under the acacia, but an unsympathetic orderly came out and warned him that he had better do his sitting outside the gates. And the more he was rebuffed the more serene and determined grew John Summerhays' temper.

Three blank days followed. He hung



"I'm awfully sorry, sister, but I fell over the railing round one of those flower-beds"

about outside the gates each afternoon, but Sister Ruth appeared to have no inclination for Cairo. She was reducing him to a state of helplessness, but Summerhays refused to surrender. He realised that he would have to make some desperate move in order to get himself intruded into her presence, and then the great inspiration came to him.

That arm of his had been in splints for ten days. Supposing he removed one of the splints, invaded the for-

pain. The more he suffered, the more convincing the act would seem in the eyes of Sister Cornish. He set about the adventure without delay, drove over to the Osiris Palace next morning, strolled into the grounds, and choosing his time and place, most successfully re-smashed that devoted arm.

It hurt him damnablely, far more than he had expected, and he was rather a white-faced man when he walked into the large, cool vestibule, and appealed for their immediate help.

They took him into the dispensary, where he promptly fainted, and was still flat on the floor when a Medical Officer appeared.

But the end of it was that they carried him upstairs into one of the wards, and it happened to be her ward, and it was the Vision who ministered to him.

"I'm awfully sorry, Sister," he explained, "but I fell over the railing round one of those flower beds. I know I ought not to have been there."

There were screens round the bed, and the orderly had gone for splints and dressings.

"I think this is an absolute scandal."

He met her brown eyes, and he knew that she did not believe him, but somehow her eyes were not unkind.

"What's a scandal, Sister?"

"Why—this. Do you mean to tell me it was an accident, that you fell over a little iron railing in broad daylight?"

"I fell over it, Sister. But I'll confess that I did it on purpose. I meant to get in here—somehow."

She tried to look at him severely, and failed.

"It's monstrous!"

"Don't you think I have had rather bad luck? People haven't been very kind to me. I don't think they quite realised altogether that I was in grim earnest."



"Her letter answered his: 'Dear Mr. Summerhays, I have forgiven you—to that extent'."

bidden garden, let himself trip over a convenient little iron fence that protected the flower beds, and wilfully broke that arm? They would have to admit him into the hospital. They could not do anything else. And he might find himself in the Vision's ward!

The audacious humour of the idea delighted him, and he was so much in love that he welcomed any possible

"I ought to report you," she said softly.

"But you won't do that, Sister?"

"I'll think about it. At all events they won't let you stay here."

"Good heavens, Sister—the Machine again! Why did I ever go to Australia?"

She proved a wise prophet, for after some sixteen hours of romantic happiness, John Summerhays was warned that he would be transferred that afternoon to an Australian hospital.

"Well—I call this hard luck, Sister."

He was sorrowful and depressed.

"I'm supposed to be on leave. A humorous sort of holiday, after seven months on the Peninsula!"

She sat down beside his bed.

"I don't think I have ever met quite such an eccentric man," she said.

"Eccentric! I'm not a bit eccentric. I've been inspired all along by unanswerable common sense. It is just the bigness of the discovery. If I have seemed an aggressive idiot—you must try and forgive me. I'm not silly ass Summerhays who had to be kicked out to Australia; I'm a grown man who knows just what he wants. I suppose you will never let me see you again?"

She looked at her knees a moment, and then straight at him.

"I don't know. I will think it over."

His eyes gave an excited flash.

"Oh, you sportswoman! Give me a straight and an honourable chance. I

promise not to thrust in again—until——"

"You promise that?"

"Yes."

And somehow he was a very happy man whom they carried off in an ambulance to a hospital that was less than a mile away. He had a feeling that he had not failed, that he had begun to convince her of his sincerity, that he might dare to hope.

John Summerhays kept absolute silence for a fortnight. Then he wrote Sister Ruth a very brief letter:

"DEAR SISTER,—Am I forgiven?—
"JOHN SUMMERHAYS."

She answered him next day:

"DEAR MR. SUMMERHAYS,—I have decided to forgive you.

"SISTER RUTH."

He was immensely excited, and the night orderly reported that Private Summerhays had been very restless. And Summerhays called him a fool.

He wrote:

"DEAR SISTER,—Have you so far forgiven me that I may come and see you.
—Yours most devotedly,

"JOHN SUMMERHAYS."

Her letter answered his:

"DEAR MR. SUMMERHAYS,—I have forgiven you—to that extent.

"SISTER RUTH."



ALAS!

HE told her, in his ardent fashion,
Her liking surely would be merged
Into a great and splendid passion,
If only she'd be his—he urged.

And so, persuaded, she was wed,
Regarding him just as a brother.
And ove did come, as he had said,
But sad to say—love for another!

PERCY WAXMAN.

1063
No. 1063 COMPANY.

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August 1918

By WARWICK DEERING,
Author of "Love Among the Ruins,"
"Boss of the Woods," "Mad
Barbara," "Uther and
Isgraine," etc., etc.

He was a nice boy, but very young and very trusting. He had been invalided home from France after a couple of months in the trenches and the command that he had put him in command of the 1063rd Labour Company that was making a mysterious mess in the middle of Flycroft Heath. Johnny FEVEREL was an engineer as well as a soldier, but he was a little too nice for the job he had been given.

The 1063rd Labour Company consisted largely of old toughs, humorous scoundrels whom it was impossible to keep sober, such amiable blackguards as Mick Douley, who weighed sixteen stone, and thrashed his men regularly once a week. The sergeant-major, an old regular, was not the terror that he might have been, and the staff-sergeant bleated like a lamb. The company was under the "Purple Colonel" for discipline, an old gentleman who rode over on rare occasions from a town about ten miles away, and scolded everybody, and especially Johnny FEVEREL.

"Your cook-house is a disgrace, sir, an absolute disgrace. As for the men's tents——"

Second-Lieutenant FEVEREL tried to explain that the men were an undisciplined crowd, and that their ideas of hygiene were primitive.

"Crime the blighters, crime 'em. Send 'em along to me. I'll teach 'em to bury bones in their tents."

And the exasperating thing was that the men were as quiet as sheep when the purple colonel was storming round. You would have thought them the most steady, obedient, high-minded lot

steady, laborious, high-minded lot.

But Johnny Feverel had discovered a distraction, a distraction that saved him from asking for a transfer or poisoning the 1063rd Company's water supply.

The distraction had taken the shape of a girl of seventeen, a girl with black eyes and saffron-coloured hair, even Miss Fay Cassilis, daughter of Dr. Richard Cassilis, who dosed the sick of Byecroft village.

Fay Cassilis was a little devil, but a very attractive little devil. Johnnie had met her at a tennis party, and she had captured him at the first glance.

Dr. Cassilis asked him to tennis. People failed to turn up, and Fay played singles with Johnnie and beat him mercilessly. He adored her all the more.

Dr. Cassilis was a widower, and Fay was his only child. He knew as much about men and life as it was possible to know. He thought Johnnie a clean, loveable youngster, rather too soft and trusting, but none the worse for that.

Fay pleased herself, and amused her father, but she did all his dispensing for

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him and kept his books. Dr. Cassilis had been appointed medical officer to the 1063rd Labour Company, and the subaltern developed a remarkable solicitude for the health of his men.

His visits to the doctor generally occurred about tea time, and the invitation was always forthcoming. Johnnie would blush and say—

"Thanks awfully. I hope Miss Cassilis doesn't mind."

Miss Cassilis doesn't mind in the least. She teased him, and he still adored her, even asked her advice. He had his points, he was a gentleman, his people were wealthy, he had won his blue for soccer at Cambridge. And Dr. Cassilis did not interfere. Johnnie Feverel's adoration could do a girl no harm.

About that time the toughs of 1063 Company began to behave rather dis-

Company began to behave rather disgracefully in Ryecroft village. Johnnie made them quite a gentlemanly speech on parade, but they did not respond. The purple colonel came over, handed out punishment, and gave the subaltern a scolding.

"You've got no discipline, sir. It's absurd. If you can't manage these blighters—I shall have to get you transferred. You must put your foot down, do you hear; frighten the devils."

Johnnie was very upset. He confided his troubles to Fay Cassilis.

"I have tried to treat them like gentlemen," he told her, "but somehow it doesn't work."

"Perhaps you are too kind to them," she suggested.

"Well—they are such odd fish. I've tried to make them fond of me; that's the army tradition, you know."

"I should try the other thing—if I were you." I would terrorise them."

"It's not so easy. These chaps have never been used to discipline. Over there it's different; they'd be as good as lambs—after a little shelling."

"I think you are too kind-hearted, Johnnie. You hate hurting people's feelings."

"I'll think it over," he said.

She laughed over him when he had gone, and when her father turned up for tea, she discussed Johnnie's problem with him.

Richard Cassilis was not given to wasting words.

"Our friend John is too much the gentleman. The men aren't bad—really. They want a red, tearing bully, loosing off bullets and oaths."

"Johnnie is awfully upset. The purple colonel has been pitching into him."

"Has he? Well—the camp is getting a bit of a nuisance."

"But what can the boy do?"

"Johnnie ought to be doped with fire-water. There's not quite enough devil in

water. There's not quite enough devil in him."

That week-end the sergeant-major went on leave, and the weather was sultry. Friday was pay day, and that meant a wet night. The camp was very happy and loquacious, and remained gaily illuminated after "lights out."

Johnnie sat in his tent, and cogitated. Staff Binny came to report.

"They won't put those lights out, sir."

"Go round, and tell them they must be put out."

"They told me to go to —, sir."

"I'll go round with you, staff."

He went, but his dignity suffered. He rapped with his cane on the first tent.

"Put those lights out—there."

"Binny, it's the little officer! Give 'im 'is bottle, old Binny, and put 'im to bed."

The subaltern went down the lines, smacking the tents with his cane, but not a light went out, and the voices grew more uproarious. He retreated towards his own tent, with Staff Binny at his heels.

"I can't arrest the whole camp. There's no one to arrest anybody."

"I should let 'em alone, sir," said Binny.

"I shall deal with it to-morrow. It's got to be stopped."

Second-Lieutenant John Feverel passed a very miserable night. When the men quietened down at last, his own thoughts kept him from sleeping. His position was ridiculous and humiliating, but what to do he could not think. If he reported the matter to the purple colonel that great man might fly into a catastrophic rage, get him relieved of his command, and that would mean good-bye to Ayecroft, and to Fay Cassilis.

He finished the night with an hour or two's fitful sleep, and woke up in a bad temper. Staff Binny came to report that only three men had answered to their

only three men had answered to their names at the six o'clock parade.

Johannie was preparing for his bath, and stood as nature made him save for the trousers of his blue and white pyjamas.

"Oh—all right. Parade them at 9.15. We'll get on with those concrete floors. There will be no half day off to-day."

"Very well, sir."

"Johannie made a bad breakfast, smoked two cigarettes in the orderly tent, listening to his beauties going on. There was a great deal of talking, and much doubtful language.

He pulled himself together, and walked out into the open.

"Parade—shun" shouted Staff-sergeant Binny.

No. 1063 Company made a sort of shuffling movement to the position of attention.

Second-Lieutenant Feverel inspected them, growing redder and angrier as he realised that No. 1063 Company was one incipient grin.

He stalked out in front of them, fuming.

"Look here—you men. This rot has got to stop. I have tried to be a considerate officer, but we have reached the limit. I shall expect the N.C.O.'s to back me up. There will be no half-holiday this afternoon. Parade, in file, right turn, quick march."

That day saw the crisis in Johannie Feverel's military career. He had challenged the men, and the original sin in them took up the challenge. They were just like boys trying the temper and the strength of a very young new master; it was sheer devilment with no real viciousness behind it.

"Work all Saturday—not me! Let's bust up, mates."

Mick Docley, the big Irishman, had his own pet grouse.

"Sure, if the boy would crack me one on th' pate, or git drunk I'd be loving him."

on the pace, or get drunk and be loving him."

No. 1063 Company worked that morning, but it worked rebelliously, sluggishly, yet with joyous anticipations of a bust.

"F'what can they do to us?" and Mick spat on his hands.

"Old Purple will come along with a platoon o' sodgers."

"Bit of a beano—what!"

Matters went quite peaceably till dinner-time, and then Mick Dooley was the first to break out.

"F'why are we not drinking, boys?"

He led an attack on the canteen marquee, and smothering the protests of the attendant, they took possession of a barrel of beer and trundled it down to the mess tent.

Lieutenant Ferverel finished his lunch, and then Staff Binny came and reported.

"They have stolen the beer, sir, out of the canteen, and they're playin' leap frog round the tents."

Two o'clock had struck, and the men were not on parade. Lieutenant Ferverel put on his Sam Brown, picked up his little cane, and went forth to battle with the insubordinate spirit of No. 1063 Company.

His attempt at restoring discipline proved a palpable failure. The men had been waiting for him to appear, and when he showed himself the whole camp prepared to go mad. A mock band started playing, a band that consisted of a tea tray, two combs, a mouth organ, and a bugle. Half the tents were flat on the ground, and while the band performed No. 1063 Company danced.

"Better send to Smerden for a piequat, sir," said Binny.

Lieutenant Ferverel withdrew towards his tent.

"I'll go down to Ryecroft and send a wire. This has got to be stopped—somehow."

He started off down the dusty road, very angry and very miserable. He had

very angry and very miserable. He had made an utter failure of the business, and the sending of that telegram would finish his career at Ryecliff. The Purple Colonel would come storming over and select another officer to relieve him. Perhaps Dr. Cassilis could suggest something. Habit and his own inclinations led him towards the doctor's red-walled house.

Dr. Cassilis was out, but Fay had seen Johanie coming up the drive, and she came to the door to speak to him.

"I wanted to see Dr. Cassilis."

"I'm afraid he won't be back for an hour. Can I do anything?"

"You might be able to give me some advice."

Picking up a sun-hat, she led the way into the garden. A hammock was slung under two lime trees at the end of the lawn, and Fay climbed into it, leaving Johanie a deck chair.

"What's the matter?"

"It's those confounded men of mine. There's an absolute mutiny on up there. They have practically laughed me out of the camp."

"The wretches! What are you going to do?"

"Wire to Smerden—for a picquet. Of course that means the end of me. I'm a miserable failure."

Fay Cassilis sat up, and swung her legs out of the hammock. She was surprised to find how sorry she was for Johanie, and how much she wanted to help him.

"No, you're not. You mustn't be a failure. Can't you get your revolver and shoot a few of them in the leg?"

"That wouldn't do."

Her eyes flashed with a sudden inspiration, and the guile of the woman stirred in her.

"I say—you really do look quite done up. I'll go and get you something. I know a splendid pick-me-up."

She made a dash for the house and

She made a dash for the house, rang for a glass, and poured three ounces of whisky into it. Then she removed to the surgery, took down sundry bottles, and with immense seriousness mixed her magic potion.

She appeared in the garden with an air of flushed authority.

"Drink that. I do all dad's dispensing. It will do you good."

Johnnie obeyed her, though the tuff nearly made him choke.

"I say, it's pretty strong! Funny taste."

"I know it's rather nasty."

That magic potion of her's proved devilishly subtle. Before five minutes had passed a noticeable change showed itself in the depressed subaltern's manner. His face flushed, and a curious, mad glint appeared in his eyes.

"I say—I shan't send that telegram. It's insubordination, gross insubordination! I won't stand it. I've treated them like gentlemen, but by George—it's time to act. Action's the thing, action. I'll teach those blighters. I'll go up there and raise——"

He jumped up, flourishing his cane.

"That's it—break the buggers. I'll go back at once. That's splendid stuff you gave me, Fay."

He made her a most elaborate salute, and was off, walking at a great pace, but just a little unsteadily. He was most extraordinarily exhilarated, and he looked as though he could jump over the house.

Fay was scared.

"Oh, what have I done! I wish dad were here."

She had to wait half an hour before her father returned from a long round, and she did not allow him to eat his lunch in peace.

"I must tell you what I've done."

Dr. Cassilis never remembered seeing her look scared before.

"What's the matter, kiddums?"

She told him, and his face grew al-

She told him, and his face grew almost as grave as hers.

"Good heavens, what did you give him?"

"Three ounces of whisky——"

"Yes."

"A drachm of ether—and——"

"What—something more!"

"Fifteen minims of tincture of nuxvomica, and some capsicum."

"And you say he looked funny,?" No wonder. I think I had better get on Mr. Feverel's track."

Fay's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh—I do hope I haven't done any harm. I thought of what you said about the firewater."

"You must never meddle with drugs again, my dear. Don't worry."

He went round to the stables, started up his car, and made for Hyecroft Heath.

Meanwhile Fay's magic potion had begotten an extraordinary madness in Second-Lieutenant Feverel. He went up the road towards the camp with fierce strides, his face ablaze, his eyes like an angry god's. He was drunk, but it was an uncommon sort of intoxication, so that the reasonable part of him had turned to liquid fire, while his physical activities remained unimpaired. He passed one or two people on the road, and they noticed nothing peculiar about him, save that he was walking at a tremendous rate and looked in a devil of a temper.

Johnnie Feverel marched into the camp where No. 1063 Company was celebrating its triumph in the middle of the parade ground. Mick Dooley, with his tunic off, was wandering around, asking some one to hit him.

Now the very first thing that Lieutenant Feverel saw when he got inside the gates was a pick-handle lying against some baulks of timber. With a kind of mad pleasantry he possessed himself of that pick-handle, and walked on towards the men on the parade ground. Some of them saw him coming, and began to stare. There were a few more—

...began to stare. There were a few warning shouts. Mick Dooley swung round, and very slowly began to laugh.

"It was premature. Johnny made a bee line for him, with a strange, intent look in his eyes. He did not utter a word, or pause for explanations, but let out with the pick handle—as fine and slashing a blow as any man could wish.

Mick Dooley felt flat, hugely astonished, for his skull was thick.

Feverel passed over him and went on. He was quite mad, murderously, whimsically mad, but notions of discipline remained with him, and were enforced by that potent pick-handle. He dealt out blows impartially, while No. 1063 Company gaped in amazement, and failed to protest. Men dodged, and grinned at each other. Menly Smith, the chief grouser, smitten across the mouth, began to bleed and squeal for vengeance, but some one caught him by the coat collar, and shook him fiercely. It was Mick Dooley.

"Redad—and a gentleman's hit ye—a real gentleman. A beautiful officer he is—after all. But I'm proud to get such a bump from him—you dirty lump of dough."

Feverel was shouting.

"Fall in—fall in."

The men slouched together in a group, fascinated, hugely admiring.

"Fall in. Look lively."

Mick Dooley, grinning like an ogre, and with a red smudge on his forehead, took unto himself the authority of a gentleman with stripes.

"Fall in. Private Shilly—I'll smack the face off ye—if ye don't look slippy, Call yourselves so'diers! I'll show ye—"

It was a wonderful parade, with the men standing steady in their places, and Second Lieutenant Feverel swaggering up and down like a young god.

"Herregant-major—"

Mick Dooley presented himself, and

Mick Dooley presented himself, and saluted.

"Hur."

Johanie appeared to accept him.

"Keep those lights steady here, till I come back. It's hot, and I'm going to change."

"Yes, sir."

He made off in the direction of his tent, passing Staff sergeant Finny, who looked like an apoplectic sheep.

Mick Dooley lectured No. 1063 Company.

"Stand steady—will ye. Gosh—he's a beautiful officer, mad drunk—but a gentleman. Private Knox, take that grin off y' face, or I'll smash it. Bedad, but we'll teach ye discipline."

Just about that time Dr. Cassilis arrived to survey matters from behind a stump of furze. He had left his car a little way down the road, and he was in time to see Johanie Ferverel emerge from his tent, dressed in a bath towel and a pair of pumps, and carrying that pick-handle on his shoulder.

Johanie Ferverel drilled No. 1063 Company as it had never been drilled before. Certainly there was nothing in infantry training that suggested such exercises and evolutions, but No. 1063 Company rose to the crisis, and strove to perform like heroes. They were made to crawl on all fours, stand on their heads, at which no one succeeded, form wheelbarrows, hop at the double, practise high kicking. Dr. Cassilis watched their contortions—till he began to weep. He returned to his car, drove back to Flycroft, still bursting with wild spasms of laughter.

Fay dashed out to meet him.

"How's Johanie?"

Her father showed a deplorable lack of self-restraint.

"Splendid! Oh, help! Those fat men trying to stand on their heads! That was a wonderful elixir of yours, kiddums. Upon my soul!—it has broken the mutiny. Mr. John is a demi-god."

"What—has happened?"

Mr. John is a demi-god.

"What—has happened?"

He told her—a part of it, and she exulted in Johnnie's triumph.

An hour later Staff Binny and Mick Dooley were putting their officer to bed, as proud and doting as a couple of old women with a baby.

"Sure, he's a broth of a boy! The old company won't know itself. It's the discipline they wanted."

Mick wandered forth to find Mealy Smith haranguing sundry of the crowd.

"I tell yer it's contry to the regulations. An officer ain't allowed to touch a man. I've got my case, and I'll 'ave justice done me!"

Mick Dooley fell on him like an angry gorilla.

"What! You menly-faced bug! You splay-footed toad with the cone!"

He seized Mealy Smith by the collar and held a big fist within an inch of his nose.

"Smell that! Sure—but you've got a real gentleman for an officer, a beautiful officer. And you—squealin' for King's Regulations. Faith!—I'll regulate ye. Say one word—and it's Mick Dooley as will smash yer head into pulp."

That settled it. No. 1063 Company prepared to adore the demi-god in command.

Johnnie Feverel woke with a cracking head and a tongue like a brick. He took some aspirin, drank some tea, had a cold bath, and felt better.

Staff Binny came for orders.

"Parade at ten, Staff! The padre will be up from Ryecroft."

"Yes, sir."

"How are the men, Staff?"

"As good as gold, sir."

Now the strange thing was that Johnnie remembered but little of the great happenings of yesterday. He went on parade to find No. 1063 Company standing steady as a rock. Johnnie inspected them.

He stopped opposite Private Dooley.

He stopped opposite Private Dooley.

"How did you get that, Dooley?"

The Irishman stared blandly at the horizon.

"Fell agin the tent-post, sor," he said, without blinking.

Johnnie passed on, and was interested in Private Smith's mouth.

"How did that happen, Private Smith?"

Private Smith drew a deep breath.

"Stumbled h'over a tent-rope, sir, and fell bon a tent-pag."

Five minutes later the curate from Hyecroft arrived, and conducted a most edifying service. No. 1068 Company sang the hymns with great zest.

Discipline was excellent from that day forward. When the Purple Colonel next visited the camp he found nothing to storm at.

"You've smartened 'em up a lot, Mr. Feverel."

"They are splendid chaps, sir."

No. 1068 Company heard those words of praise, and were adoring.

Mick Dooley's ascent was phenomenal. He became full corporal in a month, and full sergeant in seven weeks. He was a devil for discipline, and Johnnie's devoted slave.

As for Fay Cassilis, she conceived it her right to take a motherly interest in Johnnie.

I believe she confessed that he might become engaged to her when he could beat her at tennis.

Johnnie spent a week—somewhere—taking lessons from a pro.
